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THE NELSON LEE

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NELSON LEE WALKS *the* PLANK!

THE CAVERN



CHAPTER 1.

The Signals in Morse!

NELSON LEE, the great detective, was not only engaged upon a singular task, but his surroundings were very singular indeed.

He was standing in the most amazing rock cavern on the face of the earth.

It stretched away for miles—being, in fact, between eight and ten miles long and nearly as wide. A part of the cavern floor was covered with well cultivated fields, and in another part, towards the centre, was a deep lake, on which floated various ships. There was a great channel leading from this

lake to a rock tunnel, which, in turn, communicated with the open sea.

On every side of Nelson Lee the cavern walls arose—great, sheer precipices, rising up for three thousand feet, and sloping inwards as they rose. And at the very top there was a great hole, a mile across, and through this hole twinkled the stars. When the day came, the sun, for some hours, would shine down gloriously into the cavern. And it was the brief hours of daily sunshine which made this place habitable by man. For on three hundred days in the year the sun shone, and its warmth enabled the People of the Mist to grow their food.

But it was dark now, except for the flares of natural gas which burned all around the

—An E. S. Brooks Story Of Startling Adventure On A Lost Island!

OF DOOM!



Hundreds of miles into the very heart of the mysterious Sargasso Sea there lies an unknown island peopled by descendants of shipwrecked sailors, lost pilgrim ships, and prehistoric cave men. And it is on this extraordinary island that five intrepid explorers, Nelson Lee & Co., are encountering the adventures of their lives!

heaven. The stars, however, twinkled far above. And it was the curiously erratic twinkling of one star, in particular, which had caught Nelson Lee's eye.

Through a telescope he discovered the reason. The twinkling of that particular star was different—because it wasn't a star at all, but an electric torch, and it was signalling in long and short flashes—in the morse code—the one word. "waiting."

With his own electric torch Nelson Lee was now answering. He knew that up there, on the rim of rock at the edge of the crater-like opening, Lord Dorrimore, the famous sporting peer, was sprawling—and with him, no doubt, were Nipper, Edward Oswald Handforth, and Umlosi.

A good deal less than half a mile separated Nelson Lee from the rest of his gallant party—but it was a perpendicular

half-mile, and that made it difficult. There was no road from the cavern floor to the cavern roof. So, for the time being, Nelson Lee would have to be content with giving his friends a brief indication of what had been happening.

He had no doubt that Amanda Peterson, a sweet girl of sixteen, and the rightful leader of the People of the Mist, was with Lord Dorrimore's party. She, too, would welcome the news.

"Hawk and men driven into lake," morsed Nelson Lee. "Aboard cruiser—resisting—but all quiet at present."

"O.K.!" came the return signal. "Shall we join you? Beast Men friendly—can obtain ropes for descent."

It was some little time before that message, laboriously morsed, came down to Lee. But as soon as he thoroughly understood it, he brought his own torch into action again.

"No!" he signalled. "Hawk might attempt tricks with ropes. Stay there."

His companions, above, were disappointed. For they had hoped to join him. But they thoroughly understood. And in the cold light of dawn they went back to their camp on the island top, where Lord Dorrimore's aeroplane, the Sky Wanderer, was lying crippled.

IT was the most amazing cavern in the world—and it was situated in the heart of the most amazing island in the world.

The latter, indeed, was a tiny fragment of the lost continent of Atlantis. It rose sheer from the sea, its cliffs rising three thousand feet through eternal mists. Yet the upper part of the island was clear of the mist, and the sun shone in all its glory.

Below, on every coast of this island, dense masses of choking, festering weed were to be found. Weed and mist—and a great, brooding silence. For this was the dreaded Sargasso Sea; the very heart of it, for ever hidden by the mist.

It was Lord Dorrimore who had first discovered this amazing land, and he had brought a small party with him to explore. Nelson Lee and Nipper had been enthusiastic enough to join in. On the island top they had found fungus growths instead of trees; they had found Beast Men, primitive, wild.

But most astounding of all, they had found the great cavern, and, in it, a community of English-speaking people—the descendants of pilgrims, whose ships, many hundreds of years earlier, had drifted into the Sargasso Sea after a terrific storm. Trapped in the weed, and finding themselves near to the great cliffs, the unfortunate people had then discovered the cavern—into which the mist did not penetrate. And the people of to-day were the descendants of the pilgrims, and the great majority of them were simple, peaceful and kindly.

But the explorers had found that a ruffian named Simeon Harke, who dubbed himself the Black Hawk, was exercising a grim

tyranny over the People of the Mist. He had gathered all the ruffians of the community about him. They were great bearded men, with muscles like iron—giants of strength and brutality. Numbering about fifty, they had easily subdued the rest of the populace.

Long before the adventurers had come to the island, Simeon Harke had murdered Jonas Peterson, the gentle man who had been the uncrowned king of the cavern people. Ever since the pilgrims had sought refuge on this strange island, generations before, the Petersons had been the leaders. Amanda Peterson was the sole survivor of the family, and Handforth, at least, dreamed of sitting her upon an imaginary throne, after the Black Hawk and his gang had been defeated. For the susceptible Handy had fallen head over heels in love with pretty Amanda.

Nelson Lee had been attracted by this enterprise mainly because the Black Hawk and his men had actually dared to venture through the weed in a rusty-sided, dilapidated old Parazilian cruiser. They had reached the open sea, and by an act of absolute piracy, had held up a transatlantic liner, and had looted her of food and furniture. And these men were like the pirates of old—swarthy, bearded, bare-footed and ruthless.

After months of labour they had discovered the workings of the old Porto Marlo's engines; they had built a grill astern for the protection of the propellers; they had fixed a great cutter on to the prow, so that the vessel could force its way through the entangling weed. But that venture, at the best, had been a hazardous one, and it was more by luck than judgment that the Black Hawk and his pirates had got back to their base.

Simeon Harke had attempted to kill Nelson Lee and his party, and because of that Lee had sworn to liberate the unfortunate people. And that could only be accomplished by the complete defeat of the Black Hawk. He was not defeated yet; he was making a last stand in that very vessel he had previously used for the act of piracy.

WHEN Nelson Lee turned away, after completing his morse signalling, he found much work for him to do.

He was rather puzzled by Lord Dorrimore's message, for it was surprising to learn that the "island-top" party was now on friendly terms with the formidable Beast Men. But there was no time, now, for Lee to consider this point.

The recent fight had been fierce, and there were many wounded who needed attention. Most of the casualties had already been carried into the quaint houses of the cavern township, and they were being attended to by the womenfolk. But Lee himself was a very skilful doctor, and he had a mind to go round and to personally attend the more seriously wounded.

These simple people regarded him with something like awe. It was his example which had enabled them to win the battle,

and, by general consent, he was now the supreme leader. No man dreamed of wresting that honour from him—unless, indeed, it was the Black Hawk. Those peaceful citizens who were on Lee's side acclaimed him as their liberator, and they were ready to follow his lead to death itself.

"What magic have you been performing now, Master Lee?" asked a wizened old man who was by the detective's side. "Faith, I marvel at the strange lamp which burns without a flame!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I find it difficult, sometimes, Dr. Otto, to realise that you and your people know nothing of electricity," he replied. "Yet this lamp is quite simple. And I was signalling by a method we know as morse code, to my friends at the cavern roof."

"By my soul! Ye mean that ye told them of what has been afoot?" asked the little doctor in wonder.

"Yes, and I have set them at ease," replied Lee. "But why do you linger here, doctor? Surely there is much work for you to do."

"Aye, in all truth!" replied the doctor dryly. "And 'twill be my first task to attend your own wounds. Are ye not more important than any of the other men? Thus I await your time."

Nelson Lee started. Until that minute he had not realised that he was, indeed, wounded. Yet he had received a sword-thrust in the fleshy part of his left arm, and he had been bleeding profusely. His face was blood-spattered, too, for there was more than one ugly, gaping gash there.

"You did wrong, Dr. Otto!" he said sharply. "My own wounds are trivial; other men are critically hurt. You will please me if you go to them. I can see after my own hurts."

Yet he did not give any attention to himself until he had seen to the others. Only then did he consent to have his injuries bathed and dressed. Afterwards he felt surprisingly better, and he stood in the open watching the dawnlight grow stronger in the cavern roof. He watched, too, the activities aboard the Porto Marlo, which floated some distance out in the central lake.

There were a great number of men lining the lake shore—grim and determined. They were ready, in case the Black Hawk should make any attempt to get ashore.

Nelson Lee came to the conclusion that he had been right in advising Lord Dorrimore to take no action. The only way down was by rope—and that was a hazardous undertaking. A two-thousand-foot drop—and, anywhere near the bottom, it would be possible for the Black Hawk to use cunning methods whereby he might kill the descending figures. Yes, it was safer for them to remain above.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Lee abruptly.

He had seen something which caused his heart to leap into his mouth. He was not easily startled—but the thing he now saw horrified him.

The Porto Marlo was lying some distance out from the edge of the rock-bound lake; the Black Hawk and his men, in their retreat, had swum to her, and, climbing aboard, had secured an excellent refuge. For there were food supplies on the ship—water, too—and she would be easy to hold against any attack. Nelson Lee did not deny that the Black Hawk's new stronghold was an impregnable one. He could only be attacked by swimming men or by men in boats. And both methods were fraught with danger—for those aboard the cruiser could beat off the attacks with comparative ease.

The cavern people possessed no fire-arms, and so the fighting, in the main, was of a primitive nature. The Porto Marlo, now so close, was safe. In just the same way the people on the lake edge were safe. They could shout to the Black Hawk's men, and the Black Hawk's men could shout back; yet they could not harm one another.

Simeon Harke himself, and a number of his men, were busying themselves round and about one of the cruiser's small guns. It was this fact which had brought such an ejaculation of startled surprise from Lee.

For, until that minute, he had overlooked the fact that the Porto Marlo, in spite of her decrepit condition, was a comparatively modern war vessel. And her guns—some of them, at least—were not only in good condition, but the pirates had learned how to operate them.

Lee remembered, vividly, how the wallowing old battleship had approached the liner Torania, and had even fired a shell across her bows. That grim evidence of determination had impelled the Torania's skipper to heave to, and knuckle under to the impudent demands of the pirates.

But a shell fired on the open sea was one thing—and a shell fired within the confines of this cavern, large as it was, would be another! And the Black Hawk and his pirates, knowing nothing of modern gunnery, doubtless had no suspicion of the dreadful dangers they were risking.

"Is something amiss, Master Lee?"

A man named Tom Swayne, young and vigorous, and one of the most valiant of the defenders, had joined Lee. And he could tell by the very expression on the detective's face, that something was wrong. Yet it was seldom, indeed, that Lee ever betrayed himself in that way.

"Yes, Tom," he said sharply. "It's bad! I believe the Black Hawk is preparing to fire upon us."

"Fire upon us?" repeated Tom Swayne, his open face alight with wonder. "But I know not what ye mean, Master Lee!"

"Do you not know that in modern ships, such as the Porto Marlo, there are great steel guns?" said Lee, almost impatiently. "Forgive me, Tom, if I am short with you—but this matter is deadly serious. The gun which we see is, as naval guns go, a very small one. But it can send its shell for miles."

"Miles!" ejaculated the other, staring.

"Yes, for miles—it can drop shells to the very farther side of the cavern, and beyond, if there were room. And the shells, when they strike, burst with hideous effect. You're lucky, Tom Swayne, in knowing nothing of modern methods of warfare. For I can assure you, they are vile and ghastly."

Whilst Lee was speaking, his thoughts were travelling in other directions. He was appalled. The Black Hawk, in using the Porto Marlo as his stronghold, had, indeed, played a master-stroke. For not only was it a floating fortress, but it possessed these deadly guns; and the pirates knew how to use them.

And if they did use them with any kind of skill, the cavern community could, within an incredibly short time, be wiped completely out!

CHAPTER 2.

The Firing of the Gun!

SIMEON HARKE, self-styled the Black Hawk, might have stepped right out of the pages of a buccaneering yarn.

He was a pirate in every inch of him—and he had a great many inches, too.

He was a man of enormous proportions, being fully six feet eight inches in height, and he was proportionately broad, with great, massive shoulders and rippling muscles. His coarse-featured, rugged face was half hidden by the black beard which festooned his chin. His brows were thick and prominent, and his eyes, beneath them, fierce and untamed.

He was dressed roughly, but picturesquely, and at his waist hung an enormous cutlass. His great feet were bare, and the toes, all splayed out, proved that he had never worn shoes. None of these People of the Mist, in fact, wore shoes.

Near the Black Hawk stood Jonathan Betts, nearly as massive, red-bearded, ugly. There were others, too—Simon Lane, Thomas Reed, Reresby, and all those who were in the Black Hawk's favour.

There was personality in this black-bearded giant; he did not rule his men merely by brute strength. He was a man of character and there was something almost hypnotic in his gaze. Men wilted before him.

He was by nature a braggart and a poser. He posed now. He had been literally driven into the lake with his men, and they had sought refuge aboard the Porto Marlo in desperation. Yet Simeon Harke now claimed the full credit for a masterly move.

"The fools think that we are helpless aboard this craft!" he gloated in a low voice. "Bones and blood! They will soon know differently. They cannot reach us, for the water separates us from the shore. But, stab my vitals, we can reach them!"

And he looked eagerly, fiercely, at the gun upon which a number of men were working.

"Aye, we can reach them!" he went on. "This gun alone can send death to hundreds! We have but to place one of the heavy metal objects in the gun's end, and it can be sent hurtling across into the distance, where it will explode and spread destruction."

He was speaking almost at random. For he and his men, tinkering with the naval gun, were like children playing with fire. They knew a little—and a little knowledge is dangerous. But they had successfully fired the gun on the open sea, and at least they knew how to place the shell in the breach, how to follow it up with the necessary charge. All these things had been learned earlier—more or less by accident. When they had fired the gun for the first time they had unwittingly taken their lives into their hands. It was luck, more than knowledge, which had caused that gun to be fired successfully.

And, having done it once, they could do it again.

"When all is ready, let the narrow end of the gun be tilted downwards," ordered the Black Hawk. "Thus shall the flying object be sent into the heart of the town."

"Many will be killed, Sir Chief," said Jonathan Betts doubtfully.

"And what of it?" snapped the other. "I intend that many shall be killed! And methinks, Jonathan, that one such demonstration will be all sufficient."

He paced up and down, his features working gloatingly.

"For, see you," he continued, swinging upon Betts. "After one such display of my strength, the people will be afraid. No longer will they listen to Master Lee! May his bones rattle and rot! 'Twas he who gave me the order to surrender. But now I shall give that order, my friends! The surrender shall come from the other side!"

He had the means at his grasp, and he meant to make full use of those means. As he had said, one shell would probably be sufficient. For it would spread such terror that the people would cease to take notice of Nelson Lee, and would knuckle under.

"A word with you, Simeon Harke!"

The voice came clearly, and the Black Hawk spun round, his eyes narrowing. He recognised that voice at once. Now he beheld Nelson Lee standing upright in a small boat which was midway between the ship and the shore. Along the lake side hundreds of people were standing, watching and listening intently. Nelson Lee had his hand on his automatic pistol; and it occurred to him even then that it might be better for all concerned if he put a bullet straight away into Simeon Harke's heart. Yet it was impossible for the detective to take any such drastic action. Killing men in cold blood was not in his line—even though such an act might save the lives of many others.

"So ye would have speech with me, Master Lee," shouted the Black Hawk mockingly, as he went to the rail and leaned against

it. "By my bones! Come ye, then, to make terms?"

"No. I make no terms with men like you, Simeon Harke!" replied Lee curtly. "You have almost run the length of your rope, and if you are a man of sense you will put an end to this madness——"

"Stab my vitals!" roared the other. "You come, then, to taunt me? Know ye what I intend?"

"I think I do," replied Lee. "You're planning to fire that gun!"

"Aye, 'tis so!"

"Then you are a fool, Harke!" said Lee sharply. "What do you know of steel guns, and the high-explosive shells which are projected from them? You tinker with death, my friend!"

"Aye, death for the traitorous dogs who turned against me!" agreed the Black Hawk.

"Death for all!" corrected Lee. "That is why I am here—to warn you. You think to fire that gun, and to strike terror into the hearts of the people. But you know nothing of the possible consequences? Do you know what happens when a gun is fired, and when there is a great explosion?"

"I do, indeed!" snarled Simeon Harke. "Men die—and they die untidily!"

"There is more in it than that," continued Lee. "When an explosion occurs there is a great displacement of the air—a tremendous disturbance. Out on the open sea it is a matter of no importance. But what do you think might happen in this cavern, large as it is? You mad fool! If you fire that gun, there is a possibility that the whole cavern will crash down. Not only will your enemies be destroyed, but you and your own men, too. This island is hollow, and it is of curious formation. A shock, such as the firing of a gun, might well cause it to crash down into the Sargasso."

Nelson Lee was exaggerating—but he meant to. At all costs Simeon Harke must be prevented from firing the gun. Even if the cavern did not collapse, it was inevitable that there should be so minor disturbances. For the concussion, in that confined space, would be terrific.

It was a fact which the Black Hawk did not realise, a fact of which he had no knowledge.

None of these men had any knowledge of the laws of dynamics. They thought the firing of the gun would be just as simple here, as in the open. And, lacking this knowledge, they regarded Nelson Lee's warning as a trick.

"Rot my skin! Do ye, then, take me for a simpleton?" demanded the Black Hawk in anger. "Here I have the means to make the people bend to my will, and you come with these paltry lies on your lips, thinking to affright me! The gun shall be fired, and thus shall I announce my triumph."

"Thus shall you wreak untold destruction!" retorted Nelson Lee. "I am warning you, Harke. I know more of modern guns than you—and I am telling you, in all

truth, that you fire that gun at your own risk. The first shot might not bring complete destruction, but it will certainly have a greater effect than you intend. You are playing with death."

Something in his tone caused a wave of uncasiness to pass through many of the listeners. The Black Hawk's men were beginning to glance at one another, and those glances contained doubts, misgivings. Many of the men looked at the gun with a new interest—a new dread. They had always been more or less afraid of it, but now their fear was becoming tangible.

"Mayhap the stranger is right, Sir Chief," muttered Jonathan Betts. "When all is said, we know nought of the effects of such strange weapons——"

"So, fool, you heed his words!" snarled the Black Hawk, spinning round upon him. "You are trapped and deluded by his cunning talk. Bah! Get out of my sight before I strike ye! Men, get the gun ready! Let it be fired as I have instructed!"

He strode across the deck towards the gun, and the men, seeing his bearing, flew to obey his command. For in such a mood as this the Hawk was capable of striking a man dead if he but hinted at disobedience.

"Remember what I have said, Harke!" came Nelson Lee's urgent voice. "Man alive, for your own sake do not fire that gun! I am attempting no trick——"

Lee broke off, realising the futility of his appeal. Again he was minded to use his automatic. But what was the use? If he killed the Black Hawk, the other pirates would be so infuriated that they themselves would fire the gun. And Lee could not kill them all.

As soon as the boat had reached the lake side Lee leapt ashore, and he now saw that half a dozen men, stripped to the waist, were busy about the gun. The muzzle of it was swinging round, and the weapon was being directed at the township. The Black Hawk was shouting violently, and it would only be a matter of minutes now before the dread thing happened.

"What can we do, Master Lee?" asked Tom Swayne.

"Nothing!" replied Lee grimly. "These fools intend to fire the gun, and Heaven alone knows what the consequences will be. We can do nothing but wait."

"Would it not be as well to warn the people?"

"Yes, of course," said Lee quickly. "What a fool I am! In considering the possibilities I have neglected the certainty. The shell will inevitably explode near the town, if not actually in the town. Have all the people removed."

He himself ran at full tilt into the township. And he and Tom Swayne, with others they had collected on the way, shouted the warning. People ran out of the little houses, and although there was no panic, there was a great deal of fright. Women and children were sent far away, beyond the outskirts of

the town. And soon there was a general exodus. Men, women and children were streaming out by every available road and path.

The Black Hawk was not slow to see what was happening—and this further evidence of Nelson Lee's activity filled him with fresh rage.

"What hinders?" he rapped out, as he went amongst the perspiring men. "Dolts! Cattle! Why do ye not fire the gun? The people are escaping, and not one will die unless ye are quick!"

"Stand back, Sir Chief!" said one of the men. "We are ready."

"'Tis well for ye!" snarled the other.

He took good care to not only stand back, but to get on the far side of the deck. For, apart, he was mortally afraid of this great weapon of steel. There were others like it on this ship, but this particular gun was the only one the men had experimented with.

Boom-ooooom-ooooom-OOOM!

Terrific lurid flames leapt from the gun's muzzle, accompanied by a great belch of black smoke. Men about the gun fell in all directions, screaming with fear. The Porto Marlo almost rocked, and the men on the lake side fell to the ground—not because they were hurt, but because some instinct warned them to lie flat. And all about them the terrific roar of the report echoed and re-echoed in the most bewildering and terrifying fashion. It rolled round the cavern sides, it went upwards, was beaten back again, and the sound was like the deafening peals of continuous thunder.

And, accompanying it, came the whining screech of the shell; but only for a brief second. Then—

Craaaaash--boooooom!

The gun had been badly aimed. The shell, instead of striking into the heart of the township, hit the rock wall of the cavern a hundred feet from the ground. That second explosion, followed by the crashing of the rock, was even more terrifying than the first.

The ground was shaking under Nelson Lee's feet as from an earthquake. He stood there, his face pale and drawn; at any moment he expected the vast rock walls to come crumbling down, burying every living soul beneath the millions of tons of rock.

But this disaster did not happen.

The concussion was not sufficient. A great wave of air struck Lee, and nearly rolled him over. He stood against it, and even as he stared round, he saw masses of rock falling from the cavern sides. Thousands of tons fell in one place, in a great, devastating avalanche. The dust arose in dense clouds. Far away, in other parts of the cavern, the walls were disturbed, and minor collapses took place.

But the most dramatic of all the happenings was the sudden flickering of the great flares which formed an almost complete ring round the great cavern. Many, many years ago, the earlier settlers had discovered that there was

a strange natural gas oozing out from amongst the rocks. They had harnessed this gas, and later generations had constructed crude, but effective, burners. These had been developed, and improved; and to-day they stretched all round the cavern—hundreds of them, each one flaring with its own particular gas jet. In this way the deficiency of sunlight was made up, and the heat from the jets—which were about two hundred feet above the level of the floor—allowed the air within the cavern to be always pure, for the circulation was improved. Those burners, and those gas jets, represented the work of many generations.

And now, at a blow, the flares flickered, they died down, and burst out again with double their normal fury. And the roar of the flames could be heard distinctly. Then, as though the gas had been cut off at the main, every jet flickered, died away, and went out.

The great cavern was plunged into semi-darkness.

"By James!" muttered Lee, blinking.

He, at least, knew what had happened. Everybody else was bewildered—including the Black Hawk. It was comparatively early morning, and the sun was not yet shining fully through the great hole in the roof. So the blotting out of the gas jets left the whole place in this semi-gloom.

Nelson Lee's main emotion was one of thankfulness. The greater disaster had not happened. But he knew that it must have been precariously near. Even now the very foundations of the cavern might have been rocked, so that further collapses would occur—either soon, or at some distant date.

The great collapse of rock, due to the exploding shell, had doubtless struck right at the heart of the gas supply. That gas unquestionably came up from the bowels of the earth, and it found its entry by means of a great fissure in the rocks. And the main fissure must have been either blocked, or fractured. And so every gas jet had been extinguished.

And the possibilities—now—were more significant than ever.

On the deck of the Porto Marlo the Black Hawk was standing like a man transfixed. From every side came hoarse cries of terror. His own men, as well as the people on the land, were stricken with fear by what had happened. Simeon Harke himself was looking grey.

"Bones and blood!" he muttered hoarsely. "I thought the cavern was coming down on my head—even as the stranger foretold!"

"Fool—fool!" panted Jonathan Betts, beside himself with fear and fury. "Why did ye not heed Master Lee? He warned you!"

"Aye, ye are a fool, Simeon Harke!" shouted Simon Lane.

The Hawk's other lieutenants were round him, cursing him, and for once he did not turn upon them. He stood like a stunned man.

It was he, by his wilfulness, who had brought about this disaster—for the first time

in his life, he admitted by his very silence, that he had blundered.

CHAPTER 3.

A Great Ravine.

“**W**HAT was that?” asked Nipper, with a jump.

“Earthquake!” gulped Handforth, nearly choking.

They were sitting at a meal, in camp, and

remarked, “all they had to do was to cool their heels.”

Boom.

It was not so much a sound as a feeling in the air. Handforth, with his mouth full, staggered to his feet. He felt sure that he had detected the ground rocking beneath him. And the thought of an earthquake had instantly leapt into his mind.

Everything was very peaceful here, in this



Inch by inch Dorrimore crept round the narrow ledge ; before him the falling body of water roared and thundered into unknown depths. One false step, and the explorer would be sent hurtling to doom !

the morning sunshine was streaming kindly down from the blue sky. Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi and Nipper and Handforth and Amanda had all rested—after their exciting adventure amongst the Beast Men, during the night—and now they were feeding. There had seemed nothing to worry about. Nelson Lee had signalled that everything was all right for the time being, and, as Dorrie had

camp. The Sky Wanderer, Dorrie's fine monoplane, stood near by. But now she was sadly damaged owing to a charge of the great monsters which roamed upon this island. All around a slim, but effective, palisade of steel girders had been erected. The protection was not needed now, since the Beast Men were disposed to be friendly.

“That was no earthquake,” said Lord Dor-

rimore, his keen, clean-shaven face aflame with sudden excitement. "It was an explosion! An' there was a second one, too—immediately followin' the first."

"Oh, look!" cried Amanda, pointing.

Her finger indicated the direction of the great mile-wide "crater" which was really the roof opening of the cavern. And they could all see a curious, filmy vapour arising into the clear air.

"An explosion in the cavern!" ejaculated Nipper, his face changing. "My goodness! And the gov'nor's down there!"

"I'll bet it's some of Simeon Harke's rotten work!" said Handforth ferociously. "The dirty dog! By George! Why aren't we there—sharing Mr. Lee's dangers? It's—it's rotten being stuck up here, like this!"

They forgot their meal, and, with one accord, they ran from the enclosure, and hurried across the strange country with its moss-like grass, and its fungus, towards the "crater." Umlosi, the great Kutana Chief, was as concerned as anybody. For he had a great love for "Umtagati," as he called Lee.

Dorrie's thoughts were busy. He was a shrewd man, and he remembered the old Porto Marlo, lying in the lake, far below. He believed, that moment, that the battleship's magazine had exploded, and he was rather hoping that the Black Hawk and all his men had perished. Such an end would be fitting enough. They deserved it.

Dorrie, in spite of the strangeness of the situation, was as immaculate as ever. He had donned a clean suit of white. He was clean-shaven, his chin fresh from the razor, and his hair was scrupulously brushed. Nipper and Handforth, too, were looking very tidy to-day.

"It's not smoke, Dorrie!" panted Nipper, as he ran. "It's dust!"

"By the Lord Harry! You're right!" agreed his lordship. "There must have been a mighty bust-up down there."

The filmy vapour arising from the "crater" was no longer filmy. Clouds of dust were arising, and that great opening looked more than ever like the real crater of a volcano! The same fear was in every heart, as the adventurers ran. They dreaded the fate that might have overtaken Nelson Lee. Amanda, for her part, was distressed by the thought of what might have happened to her people. For she had many friends down there, in the cavern. That place was her whole life, for she was one of the People of the Mist.

At last they reached the rocky ground, and, running over this, they approached the edge of the great chasm. The dust was thinning now, and, mercifully, there had been no further ominous rumblings or crashings. Approaching the abyss, they went on all fours, Dorrie careless of soiling his white clothes. Soon they were stretched out, their heads overhanging the brink.

"Hallo!" said Dorrie, at once. "The flares are out!"

"They could see nothing. They were staring down into a pit of utter blackness—a vast, mysterious void. It was as though a fog arose, concealing everything.

"Perhaps it's the dust!" said Nipper. "That would hide the flares, wouldn't it?"

"No," replied Lord Dorrimore, pointing. "Look down there—the sun is slantin' in just at that one spot—an' we could even see the reflection of the lake water. Most of the dust has cleared away. I dare say we shall be able to see better soon, after our eyes have grown accustomed to the change. We'd better shade our eyes with our hands. Did anybody bring some glasses?"

"Yes, I did," said Nipper, who had binoculars in his hands. "I'm going to take a squint. You're right, Dorrie! The flares are out!"

"Something must have happened when that explosion took place," nodded Dorrie. "Well, anyway, the cavern is still here, an' that's something! And by what I can see, there hasn't been any tremendous catastrophe."

"I can see men moving about," exclaimed Nipper suddenly. "Yes, my eyes are used to the change now. Look, Amanda! Perhaps you can see! I think the town is unharmed, and that means that nobody has—"

"Look!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "What's that twinkling little point of light? I believe it's Mr. Lee—signalling to us again in morse!"

"By glory! You're right!" said Dorrie, producing a torch of his own. "He doesn't know we're here—but he's havin' a shot."

He quickly signalled.

And at once the reply came. Nelson Lee had seen that tiny light—visible only through a telescope, for the daylight, above, hid it from the naked eye. Lee had been expecting that his friends would be anxious, and he wished to allay their fears.

"Hawk fired gun—but won't do it again—nobody killed!"

That was the message which Nelson Lee morsed, and it brought tremendous relief to Lord Dorrimore and his companions.

"The infernal fool!" said his lordship. "Do you understand, you kids? The Hawk actually fired one of the Porto Marlo's guns—down in the cavern! It's a wonder he didn't bust up the whole island!"

"But—but why, sir?" asked Handforth, bewildered.

"Why?" retorted Dorrie. "You ignorant young ass! Don't you know what happens when a gun is fired? Think of the terrific displacement of air—an' think what it means when that air is displaced within a confined rock cavern. It might have been enough to bust the whole cavern to bits!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Handforth, looking startled. "I get you now, sir!"

"In fact, there's only one reason why the big catastrophe was averted," went on Dorrie. "This is it—this mile-wide hole in the roof. It acted as a sort of safety valve. Everythin'

seems to be all right, except that the gas meter has gone on strike."

Dorrie did not realise—then—just what that meant. It did not occur to him that when night came the cavern would be plunged into inky, stygian darkness. And that was a condition which the cavern had not been in for countless years. For those flares had burned continuously, decade after decade. Those People of the Mist had never known real darkness. But now they were to know it with all its terrors—and the added terror of the Black Hawk, lurking in that darkness, waiting to strike.

"HALLO!" said Dorrie, looking round. "Visitors!"

He had heard a sound of queer chattering; and now, looking up, he beheld large numbers of the Beast Men gathering round the rim of the "crater."

They were queer looking creatures, these. Prehistoric man! They were well built, of good physique, and they were very hairy. At one time the adventurers had believed that the Beast Men were hairy all over—and it was for that reason they had been dubbed "Beast Men." It was really an undeserved insult. For the primitive humans wore clothing of dried creeper, which was not unlike hair—although it was only possible to make this mistake in the moonlight, or starlight. During the open day, it was obvious enough that the natives were clothed.

But with their bearded faces, their tangled hair, they looked startling enough. Seen for the first time, and in great numbers, they were terrifying. But experience had told the adventurers that these people were by no means warlike.

They only attack, in the first place, because they held this cavern cavity in awe, as a sacred place. But they were not unfriendly now. Dorrie and the others had saved two of the Beast Men when they were dying—had attended their wounds, and had sent them back to their people.

It was this gesture which had brought the warfare on the island top to an abrupt end.

No doubt the Beast Men had been attracted now by the rumblings, and by the strange dust which had arisen from the great cavity. They were full of curiosity—they were like inquisitive children.

But it was impossible to acquaint them with the truth, for there was no method by which Dorrie could talk to them. They did not know English, and he was completely baffled by their queer, chattering language.

A great many of the Beast Men were dancing about, and pointing continuously in one direction. They were gesticulating, too, grinning, and their friendliness was almost painful.

"They want us to go!" said Dorrie dubiously. "Dash it! I thought we had escaped them for a bit!"

He was remembering the previous night. The Beast Men had taken them to a native village, and there had been a regular orgy of

dancing and revelry. None of the adventurers were likely to forget it. For it had been a weird, eerie scene.

It was no longer possible for them to remain at the crater top. For the primitive men were actually gripping them, and hauling them away. And when they indicated, by signs, that they wished to return to their own camp, the Beast Men vigorously shook their heads, and made noisy cries.

"We shall have to go with 'em, Dorrie," said Nipper, exasperated. "There's nothing else for it."

"Manzie is right, O N'Kose," said Umlosi. "For 'tis folly to resist the friendly overtures of such people as this. They are like to make a mistake, and think we are scornful of their hospitality. And that is a quick road to enmity."

"I know it, old friend," agreed Dorrie. "Haven't I had enough experience of savages in all parts of the world? Unless you treat them right, they're liable to turn on you."

So, passively, the little party allowed itself to be led along. And presently more of the Beast Men appeared, and not a few of the women of the tribe, too. In full daylight it could be seen that the women were much easier to look upon than the men. They had fair skin, and their faces were by no means coarse or savage. Most of them took great care of their long tresses, and these flowed in the breeze quite becomingly. And in their strange creeper dresses they looked almost attractive. There were a good many children in sight, once the rocky country was left behind. The smaller ones were completely unclothed, and it came to the adventurers, with something of a shock, that these kiddies were extraordinarily like kiddies in any other part of the world. Indeed, it was a sin and a shame to call these people "Beast Men." The older children wore grassy clothing—although abbreviated—like their elders.

"I suppose it's another giddy dance!" said Handforth. "I hope to goodness they don't feed us again! I don't know what the dickens we ate last night, but it tasted like boiled fungus to me, with some sort of rummy meat mixed up with it. I wonder if they catch those Pteradactyls, and chop them up, and put them in the stew pot?"

But it was evident that there was to be no meal this time. In fact, the primitives did not take their guests to the village at all, but led them between two sharply rising hills into a narrow valley. And, having passed through this, the adventurers met with a stunning surprise.

On both sides of them rose dense "forests" of the strange fungus which grew in such profusion on the island top. So enormous were these fungoid growths, that, coming in the night, they looked like real trees. They were of tremendous height, and of grotesque shape. But the explorers had become so accustomed to the sight of the fungus that they no longer paid any attention.

Dorrie, however, caught his breath in as he saw something else. They were just emerging from the valley, and ahead of them, instead of a further stretch of the same kind of countryside, there was—nothing.

Dorrie blinked. According to his calculations, they were nowhere near the precipice edge of the island. Yet, here, straight in front of him, there was a vast gap. He strode onwards, watched wonderingly, and soon the mystery was explained.

He and his companions stood at the very top of a great ravine—an enormous gash in the island, which cut down for over a thousand feet. Dorrie was irresistibly reminded of the Grand Canyon of Colorado. For, until one came suddenly upon the canyon, its existence could not even be guessed at.

It was the same with this ravine. They saw it suddenly—a great, green-sided gash in the island, cutting straight down into its very heart—indeed, right down to its base.

“Great Scott!” ejaculated Nipper, in awe. “But—but it’s impossible!” gasped Handforth.

They could only stand and stare after that. The sunshine was slanting down on the opposite terraces of the ravine. Yes, terraces. There were endless rows of them, criss-crossing the steep hillside, and obviously the handiwork of man.

More amazing still, on the lower slopes, which were more gentle in gradient, the grass was gloriously green, and animals, looking like dots, far below, were grazing. They were not monster animals, but appeared to be goats, or some such creatures. And there were herds of them. And not far distant there were trees.

Real trees! Not fungoid growths, like that which grew on the island top, but clumps of honest-to-goodness trees and bushes, with their leaves gently waving in the slight breeze.

And on closer examination, the watchers saw that the terraces were cultivated; vegetables of some kind were growing in even rows, and working on the terraces were quite a few of the womenfolk.

“Well, this knocks me out!” ejaculated Dorrie. “And we call these people Beast Men! So this is how they live! This is their real part of the island, when they’re not indulgin’ in any warlike activities, or frenzied orgies. Upon my word! Lee will be glad to know of this!”

“Why?” asked Nipper.

“Because he had an uncanny hunch, from the very first, that the Beast Men were really all right,” replied Dorrie. “Remember that time we had a regular battle? Well, Lee didn’t like firin’ on the beggars then, and, you see, he was right.”

“Wau! These people are gentle people, N.Kose,” said Umlosi. “For have we not seen that in normal days they live peacefully on the land, following their simple pursuits. And are not their womenfolk, and children of comely appearance? Yonder, on the

further brim of the ravine, nestles the great central village.”

Until now the others had had no eyes for the country beyond the ravine. But when they looked following the direction of Umlosi’s out-thrust arm, they saw a considerable hut-township very much bigger than the settlement they had already visited.

The effect of this revelation upon the adventurers was, in a way, profound. They no longer felt that they were in a land of grotesque mystery, where monstrous creatures roamed, and where beast-like humans lurked. This island, although set amid the mist and weed of the Sargasso, was, after all, a part of the real world.

And it was for the adventurers to put it on the map.

CHAPTER 4.

Through the Waterfall.

“LOOK at those huts!” said Nipper suddenly. “They’re not a bit like the huts of the other village. I believe they’re made of stone.”

“By gad, you’re right!” said Lord Dorri-more. “This lost tribe is a genuine relic of the Stone Age! And after what we’ve seen to-day we’re not going to call them ‘Beast Men’ any more.”

“It’s a bit insulting, sir,” admitted Handforth, with a grin. “But what else can we call them?”

“Islanders,” replied Dorrie promptly. “That’s short an’ snappy. And we can call Amanda’s people the Settlers. By glory! Look at this great ravine—look how it cuts right down to the very base of the island. Yet it’s no more than a basin, with these steep, terraces sides on every hand.”

“In a way, it’s just like the big cavern,” said Nipper thoughtfully. “Only this one is inverted, with the wide part at the top.”

The Beast Men—or Islanders, as Dorrie preferred to call them—were making eloquent signs. They wanted their new friends to accompany them round the edge of the great gully to the township of stone huts. This, clearly, was their real home. The other villages, dotted here and there, were just isolated camping places, placed handy, perhaps, for hunting purposes.

The march recommenced, but it was over all too soon, for Dorrie and his companions were fascinated by the vista which stretched out below them. They were eager to get into close contact with the real grass and the real trees.

“We’ll go down there, after the formalities are over,” declared Dorrie. “We must shake hands with those trees!”

They were soon in the stone town. It was bigger than they had believed, and crowds of the Islanders were waiting to receive them—with every demonstration of friendliness.

The “town” had not been laid out with any symmetry; there were no streets. The stone huts, of various sizes, were dotted at

random here and there, and there were a great many of them. They were built, mostly, out of the brown rock which was to be found in such abundance on the island. The roofs, for the most part, were of earth, and were sprouting with miniature fungoid growths. None of the huts had any doors, but low, irregular shaped-doorways, and towards the centre of Stonetown—as Dorrie had already dubbed the place—there was a wide, open space, of irregular shape. Here there was the largest hut of all, and in front of it stood a massive Islander. He was slightly taller than his fellows, and he carried a great weapon, not unlike an axe, fashioned from stone. Across his shoulders hung a curious chain, the links of which had been laboriously and ingeniously carved from the solid rock. Dorrie wondered how the links had been joined together, for there was no evidence of joining.

On this man's head, too, there was a quaint, conical head-dress of creeper. He had a certain dignity about him, and he was waving his arms up and down as an evidence of friendship. Flanking him, on either side, were two other men, wearing the stone chains, but they had no head-dresses.

"This chap seems to be the king of the tribe," murmured Nipper.

"He reminds me of Horatius holding the bridge," said Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "And those chappies on either side of him must be Spurius Lartius and Herminius."

"He wants us to come nearer," said Handforth.

Horatius was making all manner of signs which the guests did not understand. But, on the whole, the ceremonies passed off very well. The adventurers were more and more impressed. They were left with no doubt in their minds regarding the amicable feelings of their hosts. It became clear, too, after a while, that Horatius—and that name stuck to him for good—was thanking Dorrie & Co. for the manner in which the two injured Islanders had been treated.

No doubt this primitive people was awed by the extraordinary rapidity of the injured men's recovery. For they knew nothing of antiseptics and healing ointments. The manner in which the patients' wounds had healed was very akin to magic.

"It is wondrous, indeed, to find these people so gentle," murmured Amanda, as she held on to Handforth's arm. "We of the cavern had always believed them to be bestial and terrible."

"But how could you know anything about them—down there?" asked Handforth, in wonder.

"It so happened, at infrequent times, that one of these rough men fell from the great hole in the cavern roof," replied the girl, with a little shudder. "Such a great fall always caused death—and thus we were never able to rightly judge."

"I think I understand," said Handforth, with a nod. "Now and again these Islanders go off the deep end, don't they? They have

fanatical dances round the rim of the 'crater.' And in their wild excitement, one or two of them, no doubt, topple over."

The fact that the Islanders could not understand their visitors' language, and the added fact that Dorrie & Co. could not understand a single word of the Islanders' chattering lingo, made communication difficult. Yet, Dorrie, by signs, made Horatius understand that he desired to be escorted down into the great ravine. And as soon as Horatius understood, he turned to Spurius Lartius and Herminius and talked to them rapidly, assisting his speech by many gesticulations.

And Spurius Lartius and Herminius, in turn, raced about, gathering men together. Soon there was quite a commotion. A large body of the Islanders formed themselves into a column, and Lord Dorrimore and his companions were invited to take their places in the column.

"This is good!" grinned his lordship. "They're doin' the thing in style. Now for the grass—and the trees! If we're lucky, we might be able to bag some fresh vegetables for the stewpot. Gad! That would be a welcome change of diet, eh?"

Very soon they were descending the steep ravine. The terraces were so made that there were hard, well-worn pathways, zigzagging down the precipitous slope. And the company descended in single file, with the guests in the central position.

So interested were they in all they saw that, for the time being, they completely forgot Nelson Lee and the trials and tribulations of the cavern people. They forgot the sinister Black Hawk and his desperadoes. Everything about them was fascinating.

The nature of the vegetation changed gradually as they descended. At the upper part of the ravine, the "grass" was spongy and mossy, as on the island top itself. There were any amount of the strange fungoid bushes and sprawling trees. But as they descended the terraces they found, in places, patches of homely looking weeds and grass. And the terraces themselves were roughly planted with vegetation of a familiar character.

The lower slopes were more gentle, and the very bottom of the ravine resolved itself into a great shallow cup, where grasses grew knee-high, and where clumps of trees raised their leafy branches aloft.

It was an impressive scene when the party had reached the bottom. On every hand arose the mighty hills, with the zig-zagging pathways and terraces showing in the sunshine. And down here there was scarcely a breath of wind—and the heat was quite tropical. Dotted here and there, amongst the trees, were graceful palms, and in many places there were natural springs, and tiny rivulets gushed down, singing musically—with, here and there, little cascading waterfalls.

Lord Dorrimore was looking keen. Nipper felt sure that his lordship had had a definite purpose in coming down to the bottom of the

gully. And now that purpose became evident. For Dorrie was taking no notice of the scenic beauties, but was concentrating his attention upon a black gash, a forbidding gap, which showed in one quarter of the hollow. It was more wild at that end, with brown rocks showing amidst the green.

"I spotted that from the top," said Dorrie, as he noticed that Umlosi and Nipper were watching him closely. "It looks to me like a big cave, or the entrance to a natural tunnel. Might be worth while exploring it."

"Why?" asked Nipper curiously.

"Nothin', only I have a hunch— But I won't say too much," said Dorrie. "Perhaps I'm all wrong. But before comin' down into this gully, I made a careful note of our bearings, and I calculated distances, too. This tunnel looks promising—that's all."

"Thinkest thou then, N'Kose, that there might be some entry into the great cavern?" asked Umlosi shrewdly.

"By Jove!" said Nipper, his eyes burning. "So that's your hunch, Dorrie? But—but it's impossible!"

"That's what I think," nodded his lordship.

"If there was any way into the big cavern, these Islanders would have discovered it donkey's years ago," went on Nipper. "And the Settlers would have discovered it, too."

"Exactly," agreed Dorrie. "That's why I don't think there's a chance in a thousand — However, it won't do any harm to have a look."

He made his wishes known to Spurius Lartius, who appeared to be in charge of the party. Dorrie pointed to the black opening, and there was an inquiring look on his face. Spurius Lartius opened his eyes wider, and instantly an expression of consternation, almost of fright, came into his hairy face. He shook his head vigorously, and made energetic gesticulations. These signs were more eloquent than words. Clearly, that black gap in the hillside was to be avoided.

Many of the other Islanders were looking scared, too, and they were all shaking their heads. Nevertheless, Dorrie insisted upon moving nearer and nearer, and Nipper and Umlosi and the others kept him company. The Islanders became more and more reluctant as they grew nearer to the rock opening.

"They seem to be frightened, Dorrie," said Nipper. "Do you think it's wise in going against their wishes?"

"It's because they're frightened that I want to have a closer look," replied Dorrie. "There must be some reason for their attitude. And what may be terrifying to their primitive minds may have a very simple explanation."

"True words, my father," said Umlosi, nodding. "Mayhap there is a secret here which thou and I can easily understand."

The party had now reached the frowning rocks, and it could be seen that the black hole penetrated deeply. It was much larger than Nipper had at first believed. The open-

ing was like the entrance to a great cave, being about fifteen feet in height, and twenty feet in width. And, inside, there was a dry, rocky floor, and intense blackness beyond.

Spurius Lartius was again shaking his head, and indicating that they had better leave. But Lord Dorrimore was intensely curious. He did not want to leave—yet.

"We'll test the beggars," he said.

And, drawing Nipper to his side, he pointed to Nipper and himself, and then he pointed into the cave.

Spurius Lartius looked relieved, for it became clear to him that Dorrie did not desire any of the Islanders to enter the cave. Yet, at the same time, Spurius Lartius appeared doubtful.

"Well, he doesn't shake his head, and forbid us to enter," said Dorrie. "That's something. Come on, Nipper. We'll dodge in before they can start rasin' any objections. You others remain out here. We'll soon be back."

Dorrie and Nipper walked boldly forward, and although the Islanders chattered noisily amongst themselves, no attempt was made to forcibly prevent the entry. And soon Dorrie and Nipper had completely vanished into the blackness.

"Well, that was one way of doin' it," chuckled his lordship. "We took them by surprise—we were in before they could collect their thoughts. Jove! It's black in here! Got your torch?"

"You bet!" said Nipper, flashing it on.

"I thought you had—that's why I invited you to come with me," said his lordship, switching on his own electric torch. "Mind you, I don't suppose for a moment that this investigation will lead anywhere. But in this life you never know."

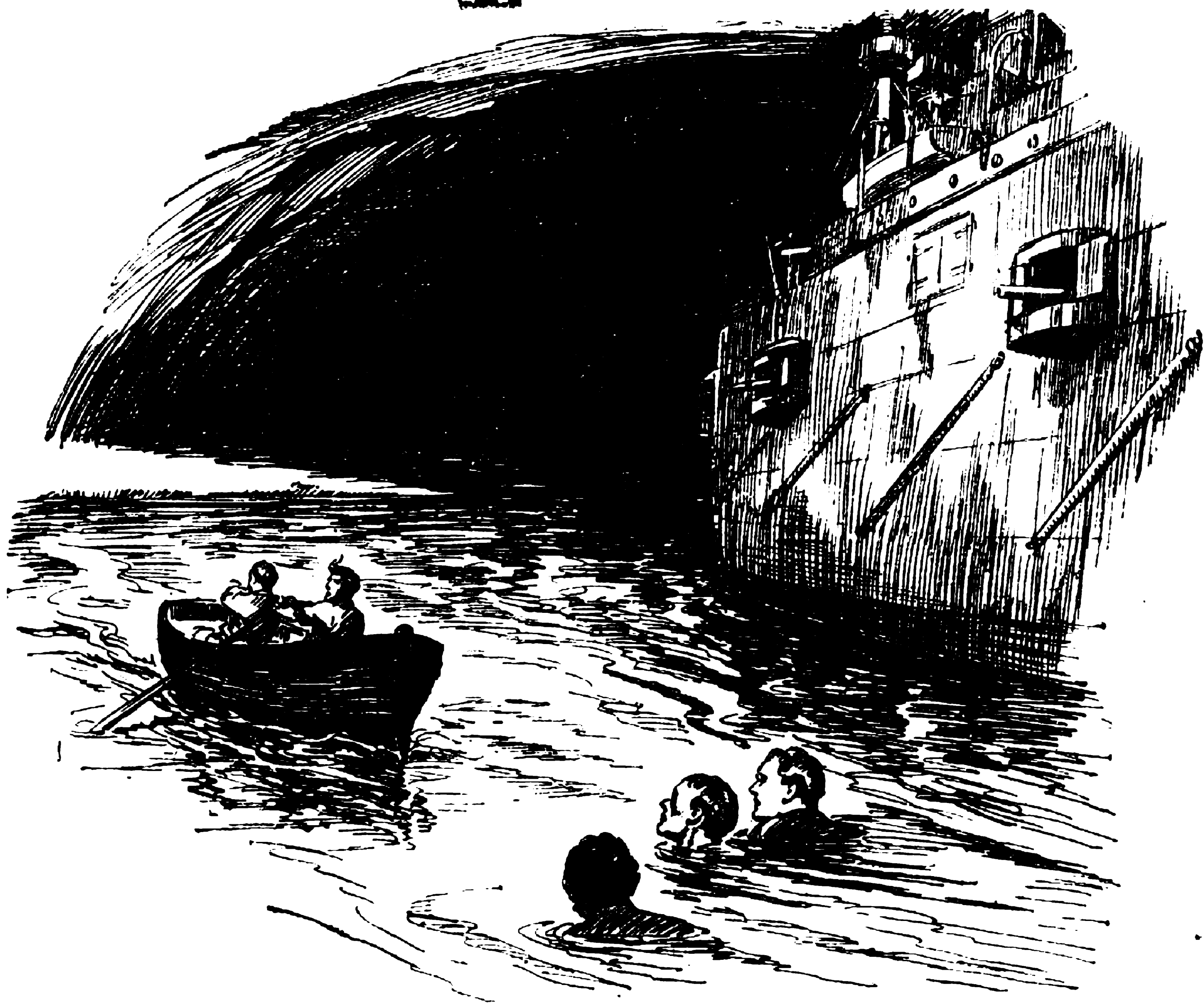
As they penetrated more deeply into the cave, they found that Lord Dorrimore's original theory was proving to be true. The opening was indeed the entrance to a tunnel which cut deeply into the rock of the island. It was a great natural fissure. The light from the electric torches seemed feeble after the bright sunshine. But after they had penetrated to a distance of about a hundred yards, their eyes were more accustomed to the blackness, and they were able to see more distinctly. Glancing back, Nipper could see the figures outside, collected about the entry. But when he turned everything was pitchy. Lord Dorrimore was still walking on, and Nipper hastened to join him. Truth to tell, they were both becoming rather excited.

There was something mysterious and thrilling about this adventure.

"Listen!" said Nipper suddenly.

They had penetrated much more deeply, and a slight turn in the tunnel cut them completely off from the entry. They were alone in the intense darkness—and ahead of them still stretched the tunnel, as wide as ever. And out of the mysterious depths came a low, throbbing sound, quivering and beating the air.

"That's deucedly rummy," said Dorrie.



In the dim light of the cavern, Nipper and Handy saw the swimmers. "Grab an oar!" panted Nipper. "They've got the guv'nor, and there's something wrong there!" Silently the little boat sped across the black water!

"Think we ought to go on, sir?"

"My dear young ass, don't ask such potty questions," retorted Dorrie. "You know darned well that we ought to go on. Don't you know that I'm inquisitive by nature?"

"I mean, the Islanders might be getting impatient——"

"Forget 'em," said Dorrie. "Come on! We're goin' to find out the secret of this place."

They pressed on, walking much more rapidly now, for they could see distinctly. The beams of their torchlights splashed ahead, and there were no pitfalls in their path. The floor of the tunnel was rough in places, but they encountered nothing to hinder their quick progress.

And as they walked the throbbing murmur became louder and louder—until, indeed, it was a continuous roar, beating throbbing against their ear drums.

"Sounds like a roaring gale!" shouted Nipper. "I wonder if it's caused by an air current of any kind?"

"Water!" roared Dorrie. "Can't you feel the dampness in the air?"

"By Jove, yes—now you mention it!" said Nipper eagerly.

They were almost running now, and they noticed, as they did so, that the rock sides of the tunnel were damp. Only a few yards farther on the walls were streaming with moisture. And the thunderous roar was almost terrifying in its intensity.

"Look!" yelled Dorrie suddenly.

They ran on for some yards further, and then halted, staring fascinatedly. For the tunnel was blocked from side to side. It was completely filled by a falling mass of water.

CHAPTER 5.

Dorrie's Amazing Discovery.

SO astounded were Lord Dorrimore and Nipper that for some moments they could only stand and stare, careless of the fact that they were being drenched by the fog-like spray which enveloped them. All manner of miniature rainbows were created by the beams of the torchlights as they played upon the spray.

Further progress was barred. The falling water shut the tunnel completely. It was coming down in an apparently solid body—and now Lord Dorrimore understood why the Islanders had been so reluctant to enter the tunnel. They knew of this falling water, and they were scared of it.

"But—but I don't understand!" shouted Nipper at last. "Where does it all go to, Dorrie?"

"That's just the point," replied Lord Dorrimore significantly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the presence of this mysterious waterfall clinches the thing."

"Clinches what thing?" roared Nipper.

"Come back a bit—where we can talk without yelling one another's heads off," shouted his lordship.

They retraced their steps for some distance, and Nipper could see that an eager, excited light was in the sporting peer's eyes. Nipper himself had caught a good deal of that excitement, too. But he was still puzzled.

"More than once we have stretched full length at the top of the 'crater' opening of the big cavern," said Dorrie calmly. "And more than once, Nipper, we have had a good look at the floor of the cavern through binoculars."

"Well?"

"Did you ever see, in the northern wall of the cavern, a pretty hefty waterfall?" asked his lordship dreamily. "Did you ever notice that there were some short rapids at the foot of the fall, with a fairly wide stream, running strongly, joining the lake after passing through two or three miles——"

"But—but you don't mean——"

And Nipper paused, his eyes aflame.

"Yes, I do," said Dorrie. "That's exactly what I mean."

Nipper's excitement suddenly subsided.

"But even if you're right—and, somehow, I believe you are—it makes no difference," he said, disappointed. "There's no possible way of getting past the waterfall."

"I'm convinced that I'm right," said his lordship. "That waterfall was in the northern corner of the cavern—and Stonetown is towards the north of the island. Look here, I'll make a rough sort of sketch on this page in my notebook, showing you how I imagine the formation of the island. It's only an end-on view, so to speak, but I think you'll understand."

He took a pencil, and quickly and roughly executed the sketch.

"Yes, I see," said Nipper. "That's how I imagined it, too. But it doesn't really make any difference, does it? It might just as well be solid rock."

"That's what I'm goin' to find out," replied Dorrie softly.

He was walking back towards the waterfall when Nipper took him by the arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"Take a cold bath, for one thing," replied his lordship. "My dear young ass, it's no good you tryin' to stop me. Can't you appreciate the possibilities? If there's any way of gettin' through that waterfall, we're in the big cavern! This tunnel is a direct method of communication between the island top and the People of the Mist!"

"And do you mean to say that through countless centuries the Islanders and the Settlers have never made the discovery?" asked Nipper incredulously.

"Yes."

"That wants a bit of swallowing, Dorrie."

"On the contrary, there's no earthly reason why either people should have made the discovery," replied his lordship. "Just think it out, young 'un. Take the Islanders first. You have already seen how scared they are of the very tunnel itself. A primitive people incapable of reasoning. That's the long an' the short of it. Moreover, they have been frightened of the fallin' water, which apparently goes on ceaselessly. Why should any of these people have attempted to burst through the fall?"

"That's true," admitted Nipper.

"Now we'll take the Settlers," continued Dorrie. "In their case, the possibilities of discoverin' the tunnel are even more remote. For all they can see, from the cavern, is a big waterfall. How can they guess that behind the falling water there is a tunnel entrance? Had they known of the tunnel, they might have discovered a way into it."

"By Jove! You're right, Dorrie," said Nipper breathlessly. "It's perfectly simple now you explain it. But can we get through?"

"I don't see why not—I've walked through waterfalls before," replied Dorrie. "They're not half so dangerous as they look. Besides, there might be a way round."

They walked back to the end of the tunnel, where the waterfall cut off all further progress.

"You stay here!" yelled Dorrie. "I don't suppose I shall be long."

"Isn't it dangerous?" roared Nipper.

"Not a bit! I shall be safe enough."

"I say! I'm coming with you!" shouted Nipper.

"Not likely! You stay here!" retorted his lordship. "And if I don't come back you can join the others and——"

"Hold on! I thought you said it wasn't dangerous?"

"Don't argue, you young ass!" roared his lordship. "You stay here—and do as you're told!"

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At first sight it seemed a hopeless proposition. The falling water looked absolutely solid—and, indeed, if Dorrie had plunged into it he would undoubtedly have gone to his death.

This end of the tunnel was, actually, very similar to the other end. Beyond the water there was a cliff—the sheer cliff side of the cavern. The water, falling from some unknown height, completely covered the tunnel end, and, below, there was undoubtedly a whirlpool. But how far below? Where, exactly, did this tunnel come through?

It was the point which Dorrie was determined to find out.

Upon closer examination, he discovered, as he had half expected—that the falling water was not absolutely flush with the rock. There was a little space in between—owing to the fact that the water, in falling, naturally, was somewhat outflung. It did not actually pour down the face of the cliff. But the spray was so dense that, until one took a close look, the space was not noticeable.

Dorrie was now creeping inch by inch round the angle of the rock. He discovered that there was a ledge beyond the tunnel exit. It was wider than he had at first believed, being, in fact, three or four feet, and walking along it was easy and safe. Yet it was a rather terrifying experience. To his back, as he edged sideways along, there was the wet rock, and, facing him, that falling body of water, roaring deafeningly.

Nipper was full of apprehension. Dorrie had already vanished, as though the waterfall had swallowed him up. Even at a distance of two yards the space between the fall and the rock was not noticeable. Nipper was compelled to go right up close, and peer round the ledge of rock, before he discovered how Dorrie had gone. Then Nipper felt more comfortable. Not that he could see his companion; the smother of spray had obliterated him from view.

Lord Dorrimore found that he could walk normally; it was not necessary for him to edge sideways. Considerable quantities of water were falling upon him, but he took no notice. Drenched to the skin, he pushed on. There was no danger whatever, terrifying as the surroundings were. The sporting peer was even gloating. This wide rock ledge was an excellent pathway—and he knew that with every step he took he was getting nearer and nearer to the extremity of the fall. Already the volume of water was lessening.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" he ejaculated suddenly.

As he advanced, the water dwindled to a mere trickle, and he abruptly emerged clear of it. He took one look beyond, he gave a great shout of joy, and then he thought of Nipper. Without hesitation he turned back, and now he knew there was no need for precaution. He fairly ran along the rock ledge, with the cliff on one side of him, and the hurtling waterfall on the other.

Nipper, waiting at the tunnel exit, filled with dread, was suddenly startled to see a

figure loom up only a foot away. Until then, owing to this spray, Dorrie had not been visible. They almost collided.

"Oh, my goodness! I'm glad you've come back, sir," panted Nipper. "I—I thought——"

"You thought all sorts of silly things, eh?" roared Dorrie. "You thought I'd killed myself! Well, I haven't! Come on! You'd better come and have a look, too. It's as safe as houses."

"Great Scott! You—you mean——"

"Never mind what I mean," bellowed Dorrie. "You come with me."

Nipper was amazed to see his companion walking boldly and easily along the ledge. There wasn't a single inequality of the rock upon which one might trip; it formed a smooth, safe floor for them to walk upon. The spray was like a dense mist, and although Dorrie was only just ahead, Nipper had to keep close behind in order to keep him in view, even with his torchlight playing.

"Here we are!" came his lordship's voice, faint above the waterfall's thunderous roar.

Almost before Nipper realised it, they were in clear air. They were standing on a wider platform of rock, and close by Nipper's side the waterfall plunged down. The whirlpool, nearly hidden by the boiling foam and spray, was not fifteen feet below. The tunnel exit, in fact, was practically at the base of the fall.

And sloping down in serried masses, where rocks and boulders, with an easy path through them—down to the level ground, only a short distance away. And frowning incredibly over the pair, and stretching away into the far distance, was the three thousand-foot wall of the great cavern, sloping sharply inwards towards the top.

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Nipper, staring.

Dorrie was grinning.

"Not so bad, eh?" he asked cheerfully.

But Nipper had no words to express himself. He could only gaze at that amazing vista. He and Dorrie were standing at the northern end of the cavern, where the ground was rough. Towards the centre there were cultivated patches, and the other part of the cavern was the real home of the settlers.

The newcomers could see a wide river, with the waters raging furiously near at hand. Further on, where the river entered the central lake, there was practically no disturbance.

"The flares are out!" shouted Nipper, pointing.

"We knew that," retorted Dorrie. "I don't suppose they can get them goin' again. All the better for us, really for this part of the cavern is in dense gloom, and that's all to the good."

The sunshine was slanting down brilliantly, and the effect, to the two watchers, was most astonishing. It was as though an enormous searchlight, far above, was sending a dazzling beam upon one section of the cavern.

That section was brilliant; everywhere else the cavern was half hidden in gloom.

It happened that the sun was in such a position, just now, that the beams were falling full upon the Settlers' township, and that the edge of the lake which was most populated. The old Porto Marlo, with her red-streaked sides, stood out boldly in the sunshine, too; and even at this distance, owing to the clarity of the air, Dorrie and Nipper could see moving figures.

"It's a direct way through—to Lee!" said Lord Dorrimore gloatingly. "Not only to Lee, but to Amanda's people. The People of the Mist! Think of it, young 'un!" Secretly and with absolute safety we can come through here—and, if necessary, spring a surprise upon the Black Hawk and his myrmidons."

"Oh!" ejaculated Nipper.

The possibilities left him breathless.

Dorrie had his binoculars to his eyes. He was taking careful note of every point. When he had finished with the glasses he gazed about him more intently, close at hand. He noted every formation of rock; his keen eyes took in a hundred and one details. He stood there deliberately memorising the important geographical details. And Nipper, when he realised what his companion was doing, followed his example.

"Couldn't we let the guv'nor know?" asked Nipper suddenly.

"Not on your life," replied Lord Dorrimore. "We daren't show ourselves, young 'un. If we let Lee know of this—we shall let the enemy know, too. And it's important that the Black Hawk should be kept in ignorance of this 'back door.' I have a pretty shrewd idea that we shall be needed—after dark."

"By jingo, yes!" said Nipper excitedly. "With the flares out, this cavern will be as black as pitch after the sun has gone down. That's when the Black Hawk will go into action!"

"And that's when we shall go into action, too," said Dorrie happily.

They did not wait much longer, and soon they were walking back along that strange pathway; they reached the tunnel, and now they hurried. The tunnel was longer than they had realised, and it seemed a long time before, turning the bend, they came within sight of the welcome daylight of the great opening.

And, at last, emerging, Handforth and Umlosi and Amanda shouted with joy. For they had begun to despair—particularly as the Islanders had gradually worked themselves into a state of panic.

And even Spurius Lartius, now that Dorrie and Nipper had reappeared, lost all his fear. Indeed, the very fact that the adventurers had returned proved that there was no real danger in the tunnel. And the Islanders, after their first shock of surprise, were manifestly relieved.

"But where have you been all this time?" asked Amanda in wonder. "Faith, you are wet through!"

"That's what I noticed!" said Handforth. "You bounders! What have you been up

to? Why couldn't you let me in on it?"

"I perceive, N'Kose, that thou hast made a mighty discovery," said Umlosi—for he knew every one of Dorrie's moods, and a bright eager light in his lordship's eyes was eloquent.

"Yes, old friend, it's true," said Dorrie. "Listen, Handy. You'll be interested in this, too, Miss Amanda!"

They were already walking away from the tunnel, and were, indeed, on their way back to the upper part of the ravine.

"That tunnel is a direct way through to the big cavern," said Dorrie abruptly. "Nipper and I have found a method of getting through a waterfall—"

"But no! 'Tis impossible!" cried Amanda, her eyes dancing with excitement.

She listened breathlessly as Dorrie and Nipper, between them, told the story. Handforth was nearly beside himself with excitement.

"Let's go back," he urged. "You rotter, Nipper, why didn't you take me, too? There won't be another chance!"

"That's just where you're wrong," said Nipper. "There's every likelihood that there'll be another chance to-night—and then we shall have some definite objective, too."

And even Edward Oswald Handforth, who was notoriously slow-witted, understood.

CHAPTER 6.

The Coming of the Night.

NELSON LEE was an anxious man.

A great responsibility rested upon his capable shoulders. He had accepted the leadership of the People of the Mist—and it was for him to bring peace to this troubled community. And the only way of accomplishing that object was to subdue the Black Hawk and his desperadoes.

But matters were infinitely more difficult than they had been.

All was quiet now. The firing of the gun, with its dramatic consequences, had so scared the pirates that they were lying low, aboard the Porto Marlo, during the day. Scarcely a sign of activity was to be seen aboard the old war vessel. Some men were constantly on duty, on deck—but they were only watching. Simeon Harke, obviously enough, was temporarily subdued.

One thing was certain—he would never again fire a big gun. And although he was more or less at bay, he was by no means ready to surrender. He had virtual command of the lake.

During the afternoon hours Nelson Lee noticed that parties of the pirates put off from the Porto Marlo in boats, and rowed to other vessels which were lying anchored upon the still water—schooners and old-type craft of that sort. Some of these vessels were laboriously drawn in, so that they were collected round the Porto Marlo like tugs round a liner.

There was some significance in this move—and Nelson Lee had a shrewd idea what it portended.

He had held counsel with the Settlers; and he had appointed sturdy men to take control of various sections. Thus, Tom Swayne had so many men under him; Dr. Otto, who, in spite of his age, was eager to be in the thick of things, commanded another sturdy band. Nelson Lee was a brilliant organiser, and, indeed, a capable general. And very soon the entire defending force was at work. Everybody accepted Nelson Lee without question. His very personality was compelling. He put courage and faith into the rebels. Simeon Harke and his tyrants should for ever be quelled.

Many men, hotheads, were eager to attack at once. They wanted to get every available boat, and give battle to the enemy on the lake.

But Nelson Lee put his foot down on this rash suggestion.

For the Black Hawk and his men, on the battleship, could easily defend themselves against the attacks; and there would be a needless loss of life. A dangerous loss of life, too—for there were no reinforcements to draw upon. Every able-bodied man of the community was already in the "battle zone."

"No, my good friends, the right is upon your side," said Lee quietly. "We will not attack the tyrant and his hordes; but rather will we wait until they attack us. On solid land the battle will be even. It would be folly to fall into the trap the Black Hawk has set for us, and to give him all the advantage of an uneven fight."

Nelson Lee was thinking of the night. He had a conviction that when darkness came, Simeon Harke would strike. There were no flares now, and the night would be terrifying to the People of the Mist. Since childhood, the people had been accustomed to the soft light from the myriad gas flares. To have the great cavern plunged into stygian darkness would, in itself, have a tremendous moral effect.

And this effect, as Lee appreciated, would be the more severe with the defenders. For they were quiet, peaceful folk, very different from the ruffians who had thrown in their lot with the Black Hawk.

Already Lee had detected certain signs that the people were losing some of their great enthusiasm. At the first thought of conquering the Black Hawk, the people had been delirious. The present lull brought back all their old fears. The dreaded influence of the Black Hawk was still heavy upon them.

But when they saw the thoroughness of Nelson Lee's preparations, they took heart. The girls and women, as well as the boys and men, took part in the heavy work. Lee had no intention of being caught by surprise in the darkness. And, having stated his wishes, his new lieutenants got their men to work with a will.

Great quantities of rock were carried to the township. And, thanks to the firing of

the gun, endless tons of rock were available. For where the avalanche had occurred, quite near the township, there were immense piles, and most of the rocks were small and capable of being hauled, or carried.

Towards afternoon, the defences began to take shape. Nelson Lee was working as hard as any of the men. A great rock barrier was being built entirely round the township. It was a wall—a solid defence line.

And it was Lee's intention, as soon as dusk fell, to withdraw every living soul into that protected area. The defences would then be manned, and should the Black Hawk make an attack, he would find it difficult to break through the defenders' lines.

It was not until later afternoon that Simeon Harke ventured upon deck. He had had a very severe shock. The blotting out of the flares, and the falls of rock, had frightened him. He had realised, in fact, how, in his ignorance, he had nearly brought disaster upon all. He was a braggart, a man of much conceit, and he had believed his own judgment to be sound.

It had taken him some hours to recover; but as he recovered, so his old insolence returned. No sooner had he come upon deck, and had taken a close look at the intensive work ashore, than he once again became the braggart of before.

"Fools!" he said contemptuously. "Think they that this stranger can save them? Bones and blood! They build walls of loose rock about the township!"

"Aye, Sir Chief, and they build it with much thoroughness," said Jonathan Betts. "Twill be a difficult obstacle to overcome."

"But it shall be overcome!" retorted the Black Hawk harshly. "The people are in rebellion—and if I am to retain my power I must crush the rebellion and destroy the traitor. To-night, Jonathan, we shall attack—and we shall be victorious."

"Ye are over-confident, methinks," growled Betts.

"By my skin! Speak ye thus to me?"

"Aye!" retorted Jonathan Betts insolently. "What came of your great plan of this morning? 'Tis easy to be too sure, Sir Chief!"

Simeon Harke cursed.

"To-night shall I prove my supremacy," he vowed. "The darkness will assist us. Jonathan. We shall swoop—and we shall gain the victory."

A cunning light came into his eyes.

"I have ideas," he went on, lowering his voice. "Aye, Jonathan, ideas!"

"Ye had ideas this morning, too," said Betts.

"May your bones rattle and rot!" thundered the Black Hawk. "Speak again thus, dog, and I'll have ye whipped!"

And such was his fury that Jonathan Betts backed away in alarm. He and his companions were soon to discover that it was dangerous to talk insolently to their leader. After the happening of the morning they had felt that they could be much more familiar

with him. But they were wrong. Moreover, he was determined to win back their full respect and confidence.

There was one way in which this could be accomplished—the capture of Nelson Lee, and the killing of Nelson Lee!

The Black Hawk cared nothing for the rest of the people—now. He was concentrating all his cunning, all his resources, upon the one task of trapping Lee.

"Aye, I've ideas," he said, as though to himself, after he had calmed. "Here, William!"

One of the men came forward at the call.

"There is a man amongst ye, I think, named Thomas Salt?" asked the Black Hawk abruptly.

"'Tis true, Sir Chief," said the man.

"Find him without delay. Bring him to my cabin."

And Simeon Harke turned on his heel and went below. There was a light of cunning burning in his eyes. And presently a thin young man, with untidy, sandy whiskers went tremulously below. An order to attend the Black Hawk in his cabin generally meant had trouble. But when Thomas Salt emerged, half an hour later, he was looking mightily pleased with himself—and mightily crafty, too.

"Darkness comes on apace," said the Black Hawk, some time later, when he came on deck. "'Twill be a darkness of much intensity, too. 'Tis well for our purpose, good Simon, that the flares are extinguished."

Simon Lane, who was standing with Jonathan Betts and Arthur Reresby, looked doubtful.

"The darkness will be as much help to the rebels, methinks, as it will be to us, Sir Chief," he said. "Many things may happen when one's eyes are useless. There will be no torchlights burning to-night, Sir Chief! For we have but to show a light, and we shall make ourselves a mark for the enemy."

"Neither will they show lights," said the Black Hawk calmly.

He was staring upwards at the hole in the cavern roof. Already the stars were twinkling. The sun was getting low, and its effect here, in the cavern, was so slight that an intense gloom prevailed. Already the further ends of the cavern were hidden by the gathering darkness.

"Men may swim out by the many score," said Simon Lane uneasily. "And if they come, Sir Chief, what warning shall we have? Faith, I like not the situation."

"Where are your wits, man?" demanded the Hawk, with contempt. "Think ye that the rebels, under this man, Lee, would build rock walls round the township if they intended attacking us? Nay! They are concentrated upon defence. No man amongst the rebels will venture beyond the newly-built defences. Thus we shall trick the man, Lee."

"Ye think only of him, Sir Chief," growled Betts.

"I think only of him because he is our great enemy," replied Simeon Harke. "We

have but to trap him and the rest of the fools will be at our mercy, and once again I shall rule supreme—aye, and I am telling ye now that the ringleaders shall suffer the death penalty. Such cattle as Swayne and Dr. Otto shall have their limbs sliced from their shoulders."

He turned fiercely upon the others.

"I say again—Lee is the man we must entrap!" he insisted. "Let us, then, gather our wits together so that that end shall be gained. Think ye that the people would have risen but for Lee? 'Twas he who incited them—he and his companions. But they can no longer reach us; they are cut off, and thus we need not let them enter into our calculations. But Lee is yonder—the people obey his every command. They look upon him as their liberator. When Lee falls, the revolt collapses."

"Stab me, Sir Chief, I believe ye're right!" declared Arthur Reresby.

"I know I'm right!" replied the Black Hawk, spitting noisily overside.

THE twilight was brief.

When darkness came, it came suddenly. And even the pirates were uneasy. For it was such darkness as they had never known in the cavern. It shut down like something tangible, something solid to the touch. True, overhead, the twinkling stars could be seen; but when one turned one's gaze back to the ground level, the darkness only seemed the greater.

It was impossible to see a hand before one's face. And not a glimmer of light showed in any corner of the cavern.

Both sides were equally cautious.

The pirates, for their part, deemed that complete darkness was to their advantage. Moreover, they maintained a stealthy silence. When any men moved, they moved on tip-toe lest they should make the slightest sound.

And it was the same in the township, beyond the rock defences. Men lined those defences, but they were ready with hastily improvised weapons. Nelson Lee, moving amongst them, sensed the great tension which was abroad.

The darkness and silence brooded over friend and foe alike. When a man whispered it sounded almost like a shot. They were afraid to utter a word, even in the softest breath. And so, as the time passed, the tension increased. It became dreadful. And nothing happened. That was the most terrible thing of all. Action, at such a time, would have been welcome.

Nelson Lee had men ready with torches—and materials were at hand to light those torches at a moment's notice. Should an attack come, Lee was determined to repulse it with decision. But the Black Hawk and his men, it seemed, were ready enough to play a waiting game.

More than once Nelson Lee silently climbed the rock wall, slid down, and ventured towards the lake-side. He did so with all the stealth and silence of an Indian tracker. He

was on the look-out for the slightest indication of movement. He was, in fact, becoming anxious. The defenders, he knew, were suffering from the strain; moreover, he was expecting some cunning, tricky effort on the Black Hawk's part. Never for a moment had Lee underestimated the shrewdness and resource of the pirate chief. Simeon Harke was a dangerous man. He was no commonplace ruffian, but a man of ideas. And in this situation Nelson Lee felt that the Hawk would make a super effort to quell the rising.

CHAPTER 7.

The Trap.

AND so three hours passed. A less clever man than Simeon Harke would have taken action ere this. Jonathan Betts and Simon Lane and the other lieutenants were impatient. They could not understand the Hawk's dalliance. But there was a deal of cunning in the Hawk's plan. He was patient in addition to being clever.

He knew that with every minute that passed the defenders were becoming more and more nervous. This great tension was telling upon them. When something happened they would be jumpy, and, perhaps, near to panic.

"What hinders, Sir Chief?" growled Betts, who was getting jumpy on his own account.

"When I strike, 'twill be the more certain," whispered Simeon Harke. "Grow ye impatient, Jonathan?"

"Aye—and I am not alone in that."

"Then be of good heart—for Thomas Salt goes now upon his errand," said the Black Hawk with a soft chuckle. "Care ye for comedy, good Jonathan? Stab my vitals, now shall a comedy be played; and 'twill be one which will turn rapidly to drama. Aye, and to tragedy."

"Do ye place your faith in Thomas Salt?" asked Jonathan, in wonder. "Faith, he is but a simpleton, and of no particular strength."

"Yet he possesses a talent I greatly admire," said the Black Hawk calmly. "Soon ye will understand."

Thomas Salt was even then slipping noiselessly off the old cruiser's ladder into the dark water. Like most of these People of the Mist, he was an able swimmer. He struck out silently.

It was impossible to see a foot in any direction, but Thomas Salt had taken his bearings from the position of the ship; and he knew that by swimming in a straight line he would soon be approaching the shore.

There were no beaches to this lake. It was more in the nature of a natural dock; for the rock edges were several feet above the water level, and the water itself was deep right to the rock itself, so any vessel could draw in close if needs be. Thomas Salt was swimming towards the side of the lake which

was nearest the township—and, in that total darkness, it was an eerie experience.

NELSON LEE was finding his men difficult.

Whenever he approached groups of them, coming up noiselessly in the dark, he heard quick movements; startled ejaculations, half muffled; hoarse inquiries. The defenders, in fact, were becoming highly nervous.

Nelson Lee considered the advisability of lighting a great number of torches. It might be the best move of all. The defenders, behind their rock wall, would be protected; and they would be able to see any movements of the enemy. And the light would give them fresh confidence—fresh courage. It was this darkness which was sapping their determination.

In fact, Lee was rapidly coming to the conclusion that he was unwittingly playing the enemy's game, and that was a bad technical blunder. He came to his decision quickly. He had seen to it that there was a large supply of torches ready; and he meant to give the orders for these to be lighted.

Just a few minutes more, however, would make little difference; and Nelson Lee had a fancy to go scouting again.

With absolute silence he climbed the wall and moved forward towards the lake. He could see nothing, for the blackness was as solid as ever. It was not the kind of incomplete darkness which one's eyes can grow accustomed to. Lee might have had a great bandage across his eyes, for all the use they were.

But his ears were acute. Few men had keener hearing than the detective; and he had trained it assiduously. He could distinguish sounds which, to ordinary ears, meant nothing. And as he advanced towards the lake he was listening for any significant whisper. He was frankly puzzled. He had expected the Black Hawk to attack before this. He could not understand the delay.

And even Lee himself, iron-nerved though he was, was beginning to feel the tension.

Never had the Black Hawk displayed more cunning than now.

Lee halted abruptly. The faintest of sounds had come to him. A single splash of water, as might be made by a man swimming. Or perhaps a fish of some kind had broken surface—Lee was intrigued. The Black Hawk would not send his men ashore by such means; he would use ropes. There were plenty of them. Besides, if there had been many men swimming, Lee would have known at once.

It was the all-pervading darkness which added to the mystery—which magnified insignificant bubbles into important matters.

Nelson Lee shook himself impatiently. Confound it, he was getting as jumpy as—

And then he did actually jump. For a sudden scream sounded from out of the black-

ness—the terrified cry of a woman in danger or distress. And the sound came from the lake.

Immediately following it there was a loud splashing of water—and then silence. And in that silence came a rustling and murmuring from the township. All the defenders had heard the cry, and every man was startled.

Again it came, this time more frantic, more piteous. A woman's scream, so charged with terror that Nelson Lee felt his heart leap.

"Help!" came a sobbing cry. "Oh, help! Oh, these fiends—these torturers——"

The voice died away as a great splashing commotion took place.

"No, no!" came the frenzied voice again. "You shan't! Oh, you brute—— Help! Help!"

Nelson Lee had already dashed forward; and he had judged his distance almost to a yard. He was ready to plunge into the lake, and his imagination was active. He pictured some poor girl, trapped by the pirates, held on the old cruiser against her will. She had managed to slip into the water, and had been swimming; the ruffians had detected her, and had given chase, and now——

"Where are you?" called Lee sharply.

On the deck of the Porto Marlo the Black Hawk caught his breath in.

"By my bones! As I judged," he hissed into Jonathan Betts' ear. "The fool strides right into the trap!"

The Hawk had heard many stories of Lee; he knew of Lee's chivalry. And that "woman's" scream had been engineered deliberately, in order to lure Lee into making the rescue plunge. Thomas Salt was a simpleton, but his ability to imitate a woman's voice and a woman's scream was uncanny in its cleverness. And round about him, as he swam, were a dozen of Simeon Harke's desperadoes. And as soon as Lee should dive in——

"Here—here!" screamed the trickster. "Oh, good sir, help me! These brutal men——"

Thomas Salt broke off abruptly. He was treading water not far from the lake's side, and he was doing his act with much satisfaction. But his satisfaction, in a flash, vanished.

For a light suddenly shot out from the lake's edge—a dazzling, clear-cut beam—and the unexpectedness of that brilliance caused Thomas Salt to blink and gape.

On the Porto Marlo's decks the Black Hawk cursed.

Even he had forgotten Nelson Lee's "magic" light. It was the one flaw in an otherwise cunningly devised trap.

Nelson Lee had been about to dive in without flashing that electric torch; for he had felt that it would be dangerous to show such a light, and thus make himself a mark. But his quick wits had told him that it would be even more dangerous to dive in blindly.

He did not actually suspect a trick—he was sufficiently deceived to believe that a woman was actually in the water, and in a state of hysterical terror. But, knowing the Black Hawk's cunning, Lee decided that the risk of flashing on his torch for a moment was justified.

A moment later he was laughing contemptuously.

For his light had caught Thomas Salt just as the man was talking. And round about him, swimming noiselessly, were numbers of



Boom-booom ! Lurid flames and black smoke leap sending pirates falling in all directions, screaming with the underground town spe

other men. In that moment Lee could not but admire Salt's clever performance. Never had he heard a man so exactly imitate the screaming of a woman. There was no trace of the falsetto in Salt's efforts.

"Not this time, my friends!" shouted Nelson Lee mockingly.

He had seen enough. As he spoke he switched off his light. His intention was to dodge quickly to one side, in case any of the pirates should take action in their chagrin and fury. Lee, by his astuteness, had com-

pletely defeated Simeon Harke's strategic plan.

But luck took a hand in the game.

Even as the torch was switched off, and as Lee moved rapidly aside, one of the pirates hurled his sheath-knife. He hurled it with all his force, his arm outflung from the water, at the spot where Nelson Lee had been standing.

But Lee was no longer there.

The luck of the thing lay in the fact that the man's aim was atrocious. The knife

senses were reeling; he had the sensation of whirling round. And the men in the lake, believing that their ruse had failed were now swimming frantically back towards the Porto Marlo.

At the same time, Tom Swayne and a number of other settlers were running out from the township. They had seen Lee's plight, and, believing that some minor action was taking place, they were eager to join in the fray.

Nelson Lee took what he believed to be a step backwards; but he was swaying like a drunken man, and his foot slithered over the edge of the rock. He tried to pull himself back, but his wits were still badly scattered.

He overbalanced, clutched helplessly at the air, and fell.

Splash!

He plunged into the water, and the sudden shock did much to revive him. The pirates, hearing that ominous plunge, understood. At least, one of the men understood, and he was the man who had flung the knife.

"Faith, the dog has fallen!" he exclaimed excitedly. "My aim, then, was true! We have him!"

Like a fish he turned in the water and commenced swimming back. Others followed his example. They could distinctly hear the splashing of the water as Nelson Lee plunged about, clumsily swimming.

That was the pity of it. Lee himself was as agile and as noiseless as an otter—normally. But now he was fighting for consciousness. His head hammered agonisingly. And then, even while he was still distressed, men surrounded him in the black water.

"Master Lee—Master Lee!"

It was Tom Swayne's voice, and the sturdy Tom could not have served Lee more ill, little though he realised it. For the detective, in his bemused state, thinking that the voice had come from somebody in the water, answered. In that darkness he might well have slipped away, in spite of the great danger. But when he spoke he sealed his own doom.

"It's all right, Tom; I'm better now," muttered Lee. "Where are you? Something hit me, and——"

"By my sinews," hissed a voice near at hand, "'tis he—'tis Lee, the traitor!"

"Seize him!" muttered another voice.

A great commotion broke out in the water. The pirates, recognising Lee's voice, not only surrounded him, but seized him. And Tom Swayne and many others, sensing that there was peril for their leader, plunged into the lake.

Then the confusion became worse. The darkness was fatal. Tom Swayne and his men plunging about in the water, mistook one another for enemies. They grappled with one another. They fought, and it was some minutes before they appreciated their error.

And, meanwhile, Nelson Lee, helpless in the grip of half a dozen men, was being taken towards the Porto Mario.



from the gun muzzle. The explosion was terrific, a fear. But away across the lake, straight towards the shrieking shell!

flew yards wide—and it found its target! If Lee had remained in his original position he would have been safe. But he moved, apparently to safety, and the pirate's bad aim caused the disaster.

Thud!

The hilt of the sheath-knife struck Nelson Lee on the forehead. It was an ugly blow, but Lee, on the whole, was lucky. He might just as easily have been struck by the knife's point—and that would have meant death.

As it was, the great detective staggered, momentarily overcome by the shock. His

Exasperatingly enough, the detective had now completely recovered. He had shaken off that dullness which had so hampered him. But it was too late. Strong hands were gripping at his arms and his legs, and he was being towed through the water in the midst of his enemies. He was as helpless as a log. When he did struggle, a great fist lunged out and caught him on the side of the face. It was such a blow that Lee's wits were again half scattered.

"Ahoy! Ahoy!" softly called one of Lee's captors.

For in the Stygian blackness the men were uncertain as to their whereabouts. They had lost their sense of direction.

"Who calls?" came a rough voice from singularly near at hand.

"Are ye friend?" called Thomas Salt. "We know not which way to swim——"

"Faith, is that you, Thomas?"

"Aye! We have the traitor with us——"

"Then ye are in luck," said the voice. "Come—this way! Ye are close against the ladder. Here, one of you men, hasten and inform Master Harke——"

"I need no informing, fool!" came the Black Hawk's voice from somewhere above. "Think ye I have no ears? Let the men come aboard."

There was a confused sound of men clutching at the ladder; heavy breathing; a muttered curse or two. And, farther out in the water, a big commotion, as Tom Swayne and the other defenders sought vainly for Nelson Lee.

Twice during the brief journey up the cruiser's ladder, Nelson Lee attempted to break free. The first time he nearly succeeded. He wrenched himself from the grasp of his captors, he plunged outwards, and would, indeed, have gone into the water. But he crashed into a man below, unseen in the darkness. This man, cursing wildly, grabbed at the invisible object which had struck him. Nelson Lee was hauled up again, and now the pirates gripped him with a ferocity which made him wince.

He was half-dragged, half-carried to the deck. Near the top he struggled again, but he was quickly subdued and flung forward upon the deck. Men fell upon him, holding him down. So heavy was the mass of brutal humanity that most of the breath was knocked out of Lee's body.

"We have him, Sir Chief!" gasped one of the drenched men. "We have him here—beneath us."

"'Tis good!" came the Black Hawk's gloating voice. "Secure him well, and then carry him below to my own cabin. Did I not tell ye that my plan would work?"

He was congratulating himself without cause; for his cunning plan had, in fact, failed miserably. Not for a moment had Nelson Lee been tricked. It was the atrociously bad aim of an enraged man which had brought about Lee's capture.

CHAPTER 8.

Watchers in the Darkness.

"THERE'S no doubt about it, you fellows, we've got to get busy."

Lord Dorrimore spoke decisively.

He was squatting in front of one of the huts in Stonetown, and with him were Umlosi, Nipper and Handforth. The girl, Amanda, had been placed in the care of some of the Islander Women, and she was now sleeping safely.

There was no orgy in progress. Night had come, and Stonetown, for the most part, was quiet. In the big, central space a great fire burned, and its flickering light sent long, grotesque shadows in all directions. Squatting in front of the great stone hut was Horatius himself, and he was flanked on either side, as before, by Spurius Lartius and Herminius. Numbers of the other islanders were taking their ease in front of their own huts.

The evening meal was over. The guests had partaken heartily, for the food had not been unpalatable. Lord Dorrimore badly wanted to smoke, but he thought it wiser not to do so. It was quite possible that the Islanders would turn against him, deeming him to be some kind of devil.

"It's a black night," continued Dorrie, as he stared out beyond the range of the big fire. "An' if it's dark up here, on the island top, what must the darkness be like in the cavern?"

"And the gov'nor's there—in danger!" said Nipper impatiently. "You're right, sir! We've got to do something. But what?"

"There's no urgent hurry, lad," said his lordship gently. "Night has only just fallen, and that cur, Simeon Harke, is not likely to commence any fireworks yet awhile."

"Thou art optimistic, as ever, N'Kose," said Umlosi disapprovingly. "Thinkest thou that the enemy will dally? Wau! My snake tells me that Umtagati, the wizard, is in danger. Thou has found a way through into the great cavern; therefore, let us take that way; and, further, let us take it at once."

"I'll have a chat with Horatius," said Dorrie, rising to his feet. "This is the most infernal job I ever tackled! I doubt if he'll get my meanin'; an' even if he does get it, it's any odds that he'll refuse to help."

"There's nothing to prevent us going alone, is there?" asked Nipper. "There are four of us, and——"

"If the worst comes to the worst, we'll tackle the job alone," interrupted Dorrie. "But I was rather keen on takin' a relief force with me. These Islanders are hefty—and they're mighty fighters. Besides, think of the moral effect? Think of the paralytic fits the Hawk's men will have when they see hordes of the 'Beast Men' bearing down upon them!"

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "If only you can persuade them to help, Dorrie!"

Lord Dorrimore did his best. He was exasperated by his inability to talk to the chief

of the Islander tribe. He could only trust to his eloquence in making signs. Horatius was very patient, and he watched Dorrie closely. In attendance, Spurius Lartius and Herminius watched, too. Others of the Islanders gathered round.

Lord Dorrimore went into elaborate details; he pointed to himself and his companions, and then he indicated, by signs, the tunnel, and he counterfeited the waterfall. And, by dint of perseverance, he even made Horatius understand that the waterfall could be passed in safety. Dorrie pointed to numbers of the Islanders, showing that he desired the men to accompany the expedition.

It was a long job.

But, by degrees, Dorrie triumphed. He made himself understood. His friends were in peril; help was needed. He, Horatius, could supply that help. Dorrie wanted a large number of men, and perhaps there would be fighting.

Considering that not one word passed between them, it was an absolute triumph for the sporting peer. For, as soon as Horatius did understand, he jabbered quickly, and he waved his arms, giving all sorts of orders.

And the adventurers, to their joy, soon saw a hundred men, strong, collecting in column form. And every man was armed with some kind of stone weapon. It was clear that Spurius Lartius was placed in command of the column. Horatius himself, being mindful of his responsibilities, elected to remain in Stonetown.

"It's just marvellous, Dorrie," said Nipper breathlessly. "They not only understand, but they're coming with us! Do you think they really know what you mean? Will they consent to come into the tunnel, and pass beneath the waterfall?"

"They'll come," replied Dorrie confidently.

And soon, with many torches flaring, the entire party started down the steep zigzag pathways of the great ravine.

It was an impressive sight. Numbers of the other Islanders came to the edge of the gully to watch—including many of the women. Amanda Peterson was there, too. Indeed, she had begged of Dorrie to let her go; but Dorrie was firm. This was no work for a girl! She was perfectly safe with the Islander women, and, if the expedition was successful, she would soon be informed, and then it would only be a matter of time before she was restored to her people. And Amanda, being a sensible girl, saw the wisdom of Lord Dorrimore's arguments, and she no longer pleaded.

"'Tis well, N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi, his eyes aglow. "We go on the warpath!"

"Yes, you bloodthirsty old blighter!" said his lordship. "You've been waitin' for this for days, haven't you?"

"My snake tells me, my father, that there will be a great battle."

"Well, that snake of yours—which is really your instinct—is generally right," admitted Dorrie. "Let's hope the battle goes in our favour, old friend."

He turned to Nipper.

"I'm not goin' to make use of these Islanders at once," he explained. "It would be a bad mistake to take them all into the cavern straight away. First of all we must do some scoutin', and see how the land lies. And that will be all to the good, for Spurius Lartius will not be unduly alarmed."

Dorrie was right. When, at length, the expedition reached the grassy hollow at the bottom of the gully, there was a halt. Dorrie made signs to Spurius Lartius, indicating that he desired the Islanders to remain here. Only Umlosi and himself would go forward into the tunnel.

Nipper and Handforth stood watching and listening. It was rather a pantomime, for Dorrie, as he made the various signs, spoke, too. He knew that the Islanders could not understand, but it helped him.

"Oh, is that so?" murmured Nipper, giving Handy a keen glance. "So Dorrie and Umlosi are going through the tunnel alone? The Islanders are to be left here, in camp—left here until they're wanted!"

"And we're included," said Handforth. "Very funny! Can't you hear me laughing?"

"It's a scream!" said Nipper, with a snort.

Spurius Lartius was quite relieved when he understood. He nodded repeatedly, and grinned. He and the other Islanders were to remain here, and, without any further delay, Dorrie turned to Umlosi, and they both started off into the cave, Umlosi holding aloft a great flaming torch.

"Just a minute," said Dorrie. "What are you kids doin' here?"

He had discovered that Nipper and Handforth were with them.

"We're coming!" said Nipper firmly.

"Don't make me laugh!" retorted his lordship.

"We're coming!" said Nipper and Handforth in one voice.

"But, look here, my dear young asses! Be sensible!" urged Dorrie. "Umlosi and I are goin' scoutin'. It might be hours before there's any real action. You two stay here, an'—"

"You can talk until you're blue in the face—until your vocal chords become paralysed," said Nipper. "But neither you nor Umlosi can prevent us coming, Dorrie. If you don't let Handy and I go with you, we'll wait a bit, and then follow."

Lord Dorrimore shrugged helplessly.

"That's the worst of this generation," he grumbled. "No respect for your elders!"

"Rats!" grinned Nipper. "You know jolly well that you couldn't leave us behind. Do you think I'm not worried about the guv'nor?"

"I'm only thinkin' about the danger—"

"Then forget it!" growled Nipper. "We're all in this together!"

And so, a minute later, they were advancing into the great tunnel, and the roar of the waterfall was becoming louder and louder in their ears.

At last, after what seemed to be an interminable walk, they found the air, ahead of them, filled with misty spray. Handforth was bubbling with excitement—for he had not yet seen the waterfall. Neither, for that matter, had Umlosi; but the great Kutana chieftain was as immobile as ever.

"Great guns!" ejaculated Handforth, his voice breathless with awe.

Umlosi's flaming torch had revealed the waterfall at the end of the tunnel—the great mass of water, falling sheer, falling, apparently, into the bowels of the earth. It was an impressive sight.

"Rather wonderful, eh?" roared Dorrie.

"Marvellous, sir!" yelled Handforth.

"Better douse that light, Umlosi," went on Dorrie. "I don't think it can be seen through the fall—but we'll take no chances. After this we'll rely upon our electric torches—an' keep them directed close to the ground."

"But—but how can we get past this fall?" asked Handforth, in amazement. "There's not an inch of space anywhere!"

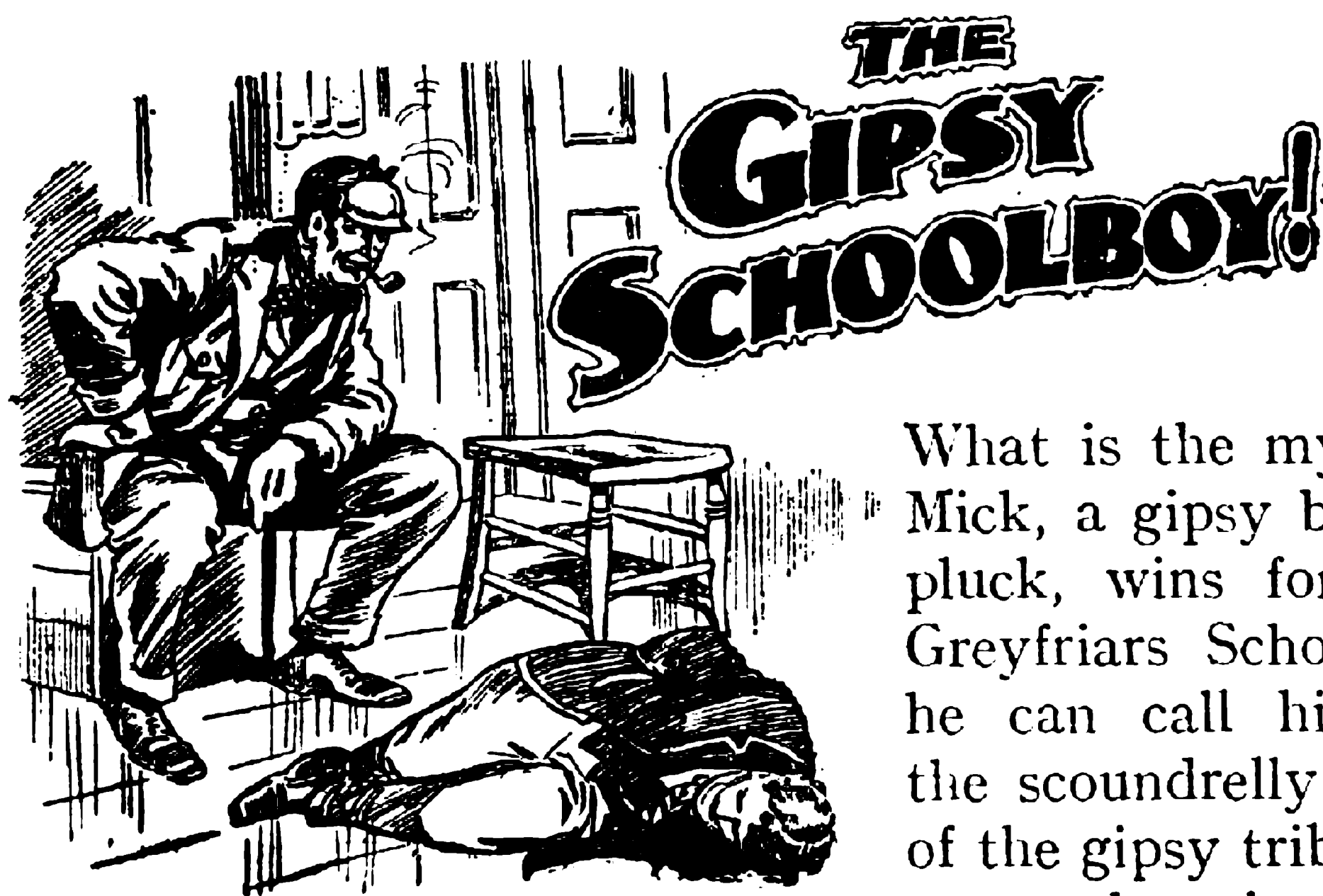
"That's all you know," replied Dorrie calmly.

Umlosi beat the torch against the rock wall, and it was quickly extinguished.

"I'll go first!" shouted Dorrie. "You'd better come immediately after me, Umlosi, and then you, Handy—an' Nipper will bring up the rear. He knows the ropes, and so do I. Not that there's any danger. The rock path behind the fall is as safe as Brooklands track."

Torch in hand, the sporting peer walked right up to the face of the falling water. Handforth watched fascinatedly. Dorrie suddenly turned and vanished amidst the spray. In single file the others followed. Umlosi said nothing, but he was vastly impressed.

And so they made rapid progress, passing along that ledge, with a wet rock wall on one side, and a smooth mass of falling water on the other. Soon they emerged, and although the noise was as deafening as ever, they knew that they were now in the open air. Yet it was as black as pitch all about



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them. Never in their lives had they experienced such darkness. For, from this angle, even the stars could not be seen overhead, in the "crater" opening.

"Don't like the look of it," muttered Lord Dorrimore.

Nobody else heard him. He was, in fact, speaking to himself. The blackness of the cavern, he was convinced, portended trouble.

The others waited. Dorrie had switched his torch off, and in the blackness, nobody dared move a foot. It was a rather terrifying experience, with the spray splashing over them, and with the thunder of the falls drumming into their ears.

Then a tiny circle of light appeared on the rock, not far distant. Lord Dorrimore was bending down, holding his torch close to the rocks. Carefully, he picked his way to a lower ledge. There he waited, his back to the great cavern, showing the light downwards. Thus, the others were able to climb down in safety. So it went on. The distance was not so great. Dorrie went first, picking his way with infinite care. The others waited until he had reached a certain spot, then Dorrie would turn and hold the light down.

By doing this there was little or no danger of the torchlight being seen from a distance. Dorrie realised that even the smallest light might be detected. It was as well to take every precaution.

"I think we're down now," he said softly.

It was possible to talk in ordinary tones now. They had left the waterfall well behind; they had descended the rocks diagonally, and now, at last, they were at the base. Level ground stretched in front of them.

It was well that Lord Dorrimore had memorised the details of the place. He could see nothing now—but his sense of direction was acute. He knew how they had descended from the waterfall, and he knew that if they kept straight ahead on the land, they would skirt the great wall of the cavern, and ultimately would reach the township.

But that was not Lord Dorrimore's intention. He had seen, earlier, a small boat lying amongst some reeds near the river-bank. For this river, after the rapids flowed quite sedately through cultivated tracts of land. The rocks were not so apparent here; mossy banks lined the river, and there were reeds, just as in any English glen. Only the lake itself was girt by bare rock.

"What are we going to do, Dorrie?" whispered Nipper.

"You'll follow me," replied his lordship. "We're not far from the river bank here, an' I can easily pick my way to it. I can't see a thing, of course—but I know there's a boat lyin' on the bank about half a mile distant. Once we get on that boat we shall be in a better fix, because we can glide down the river noiselessly. We shan't need any light, either. On land we should be more or less baffled."

Dorrie appreciated the need for them to approach in secret. He had an instinctive knowledge that the situation here, in the

cavern, was acute. Something was brewing—and something ugly.

This absolute blackness could only mean one thing. Both sides were waiting. The Black Hawk and his men were either preparing for an attack, or guarding themselves against an attack from the other side. The Settlers, with Nelson Lee in command, were probably entrenched in the township. Friend and foe alike were waiting in the darkness.

"I don't like it, Dorrie—it makes me feel all quivery down the spine," whispered Nipper, clutching at his lordship's arm. "This silence and darkness means that everything is quiet—but I'd rather see thousands of glaring lights, and hear the tumult of battle."

"So would I," growled Dorrie. "There's nothin' more nerve-racking than inaction, especially when the opposin' sides are hidden by darkness. I've experienced something of the same kind in the depths of the jungle. To be uncertain, to be on the constant quiver, to know that the enemy is near, and perhaps crawlin' nearer—that's a test for the strongest nerves."

"Well, let's be doing something," said Handforth, whose heart was thudding. "My nerves are getting a bit jumpy already! My only sainted aunt! There's—there's a feeling of brooding danger in the very air!"

As they walked on, following Dorrie, they imagined that lurking figures were near to them. It was impossible to know. A hundred men might have been within a score of yards, but not one of the hundred could have been seen. Once or twice, when they brushed against bushes, they jumped. And on one occasion Handforth nearly plunged headlong into the river, and he was only just pulled aside in the nick of time by Umlosi.

Dorrie, by flashing his torch close to the ground now and again, managed to keep his direction right. But it wasn't long before he feared that he had gone astray somewhere. The boat would not be as far as this. Perhaps he had missed it; he even began to think that it might be on the other side of the river. But no; his memory had not played him such a trick.

Then it occurred to him that the boat had been removed during the interval of time. In that case they were wasting valuable minutes. Better to have kept to the cavern wall, and worked their way round—

"Ah!" murmured Dorrie, with untold relief.

He had blundered against something, and, crouching down, he flashed his torch—and was gladdened to see the dull side of a squat ship's boat.

"I wasn't wrong, after all, then," murmured Dorrie. "Lend a hand, you fellows! There are oars here, an' everything. We'll soon have her in the water. After that we shall be more comfortable."

With scarcely a sound they slid the boat into the water, and whilst Dorrie and Umlosi held her to the bank, Nipper and Handforth

climbed in. The others followed. Umlosi secured the oars, and the boat was soon out in mid-stream, gliding gently down towards the central lake on the current.

There was no need for Umlosi to row; he used an oar for steering purposes. Slowly and surely the boat was being carried onwards, and not a sound did it make. Now and again it touched the bank, either on one side or the other, for it was impossible to see a hand's breadth in any direction.

The adventurers had lost all sense of distance. They all had a vague idea that the lake was only a short distance ahead. Actually it was three miles away from them, and there were many turns and twists in the river to be negotiated. They were in a part of the cavern which was absolutely deserted.

"Look!" exclaimed Nipper suddenly, with a catch in his voice.

But the others had seen. A light had appeared far in the distance ahead—a tiny, yellowish glow, at first, and it rapidly strengthened until it became a miniature flare. It was low down, vague, mysterious.

Then a similar light appeared near to the first—then a third, a fourth, a fifth, and many others. Even at this distance the adventurers could see a haze of smoke arising into the glow cast by the flames.

"They've set something on fire!" muttered Handforth.

"Look like it," said Nipper.

But Dorrie had binoculars to his eyes, and he shook his head.

"You're both wrong," he said. "I can see as clear as daylight through these glasses. Those lights are spreadin' all over the deck of a big ship. Yes, she is the Porto Marlo."

"The pirate ship!"

"Yes," said Dorrie. "They're torches, I believe—flarin' torches, like the one Umlosi used as we were coming down the tunnel. But these must be bigger—an' they're being fixed all over the ship—I can see men movin' about, too. Looks as if there's something doin' at last."

Umlosi, without receiving any instructions, had now got two oars into the water, and was pulling strongly. That light in the distance, although shedding no radiance over this part of the country, served as an objective. And it was even possible to faintly detect the river banks—so that there was no danger of running into them. The boat now progressed rapidly.

Vaguely through the air came the sounds of revelry. Men were shouting and yelling with laughter. A great commotion was afoot. And the watchers had not the slightest doubt that all this noise was being created by the Black Hawk and his pirates. Either they had secured a victory, or they were on the point of launching a big attack.

Whatever the reason, Dorrie felt the urge to be as near to the scene as possible. But he knew that he and his companions held a big advantage. Their presence in the cavern was not known, and thus they were in a

position to spring a dramatic surprise. Dorrie glowed inwardly as he remembered Spurius Lartius and his sturdy warriors waiting in the hollow, at the further end of the secret tunnel.

As the boat drew nearer to the lake, the scene in the distance became clearer. It was now obvious to the naked eye that the torches were flaring on the old warship. The vessel, indeed, was festooned with the lights. And the water, all around, reflected the glow eerily.

"Hallo!" said Dorrie suddenly.

The boat, shooting forward, had left the river behind. The banks fell away. They were already gliding out upon the bosom of the lake itself. But they were at the further end of the wide body of water, and still more than a mile from the grotesquely illuminated ship. It was strange to see that comparatively modern vessel, with its elaborate electric lighting equipment, lit by crude torches.

"This ought to do," said Dorrie, after a while. "Now, Nipper, I don't want you to cut up rusty. You're a sensible cap—and it's up to you to be sensible now."

"That depends upon what you call being sensible," replied Nipper.

"Well, you and Handy must remain here, in charge of the boat. I'm not boastin', but I'll swear that I'm a better swimmer than you are. And Umlosi's a darned sight better than the lot of us."

As he was speaking, Dorrie was divesting himself of some of his clothing.

"Here's the wheeze in a nutshell," he went on. "Umlosi and I are going ahead—in the water. It's safer. The boat might be spotted. No chance of it bein' seen here, because it's beyond the range of the lights. If Umlosi and I swim, we shan't be in much danger."

"Not from the pirates—but what of the water itself?" asked Nipper quickly. "How do you know that the lake is safe? There might be giant devil-fish lurking in this black water—even sharks."

"There might be sea serpents," retorted Dorrie. "Anyhow, we're goin' to take that chance. Ready, old friend?"

"Even so, N'Kose," rumbled Umlosi.

Before Nipper and Handforth could make any objections, and they were quite ready to do so—Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi had slid into the water, and were swimming strongly away.

"Come on!" urged Handforth, grabbing one of the oars.

"No!" said Nipper. "That wouldn't do, old man. Dorrie trusts us, and we can't let him down. We'll wait here for a bit—and see what happens. By Jove! I wish I knew what all the noise meant. I can't see any boats leaving that ship, can you? The beggars seem to be holding a jollification of some kind—and that's what makes it so mysterious. They couldn't have gained any big victory, or we should have heard the noises of the battle."

Meanwhile, Dorrie and Umlosi, close together, were swimming strongly and silently. The water was so comfortably warm that swimming was a real pleasure. Nearer and nearer the pair drew towards the Porto Marlo. And their presence in the lake, at such a time, was providential.

CHAPTER 9.

Nelson Lee Walks the Plank.

SIMEON HARKE was offensive with gloating satisfaction.

As usual, he claimed all the credit for the success of the ruse. Nelson Lee was captured! What with the talking of the men, and the general excitement, the Black Hawk did not even know that Nelson Lee had fallen into his hands by the sheerest stroke of luck. It was a cruel fluke, for Nelson Lee, actually, had easily seen through the trick.

The detective, as directed, was forced down into Simeon Harke's cabin. He was taken down a steep stairway, along a passage, and then into the cabin itself.

Lee was perfectly calm. He knew quite well that there was little or no hope for him, for it was virtually impossible for the Settlers to rescue him. But he had not fallen into the enemy's hands through any folly or carelessness of his own. And Lee, at heart, was something of a fatalist.

The cabin was commodious, and its furniture was still quite good. But there was a great litter everywhere, an assortment of dirty crockery, and the like. Glasses stood on the table, too, and the air reeked with the fumes of rum. For the Settlers had good supplies of raw spirits, secured, mostly, from derelicts which came drifting, at long intervals, into the Sargasso weed. Many of these vessels, in fact, contained wondrous prizes in the way of food stores for the Settlers.

It was curious to see a crudely-made candle burning on the table. Every porthole was closely covered, so that no glimmer of light could emerge. The Black Hawk himself had no great liking for the darkness, and while awaiting the execution of his plan, he had remained here.

"Let the prisoner be chained," he ordered harshly.

Lee was evidently not the first prisoner to be brought into this cabin. For, fixed to one wall were a number of chains, with strong ankle and wrist clamps. They had certainly not been there when this vessel had been the pride of the Parazilian Navy. Nelson Lee was forced against the wall, and the anklets and the wristlets were cruelly locked.

"Now, Master Lee, I think we can talk in comfort," said Simeon Harke, with a deep and evil chuckle.

The men retired. Only Jonathan Betts and Simon Lane remained. Nelson Lee, dripping wet, gazed upon his captors with such

calm eyes that they experienced a twinge of discomfort. And they were hardened cases.

"Enough!" snarled the Hawk suddenly.

He strode forward, and for a moment it seemed that he was about to strike Lee brutally in the face. But Lee's utter helplessness was so apparent that Simeon Harke hesitated, and his rage evaporated. He laughed uproariously.

"May your marrows rot!" he jeered. "And so, my friend, ye are the leader of the rebels! Stab my vitals! But ye have come swiftly to an end!"

"At the moment, Harke, you have the upper hand," said Lee coolly. "But let me remind you that there are many sturdy men ready enough to call you to account——"

"Bones and blood!" broke in the Black Hawk. "Men, ye call them? After such rabbits have seen your death, think ye that they will have any stomachs for fighting?"

He instantly detected the swift look of consternation which came into Lee's eyes.

"Ah, ye grow afraid, thinking, mayhap, of the doom which awaits ye?"

"No!" replied Lee quietly. "It may surprise you, Harke, but I was not thinking of myself—but of the unfortunate people you have so long tyrannised."

"They shall suffer to the full!" growled the Black Hawk. "Every ringleader shall have his head sliced from his accursed shoulders! Aye, and some of the womenfolk shall suffer the full penalty, too! But what think ye of the brilliance of my scheme?"

He laughed at his own cleverness.

"Had I launched an attack upon the township whilst you still lived, the rebels would have had you to lead them," he continued.

"'Twould have been folly. You have done much to put heart into the fools, and your presence would have been equal to the strength of a hundred men. Thus it was that I plotted to seize ye first."

Nelson Lee had already arrived at this conclusion.

"With you my prisoner, the problem resolves itself," continued Simeon Harke. "For you, Master Lee, will be put to death so all can see. And, by my bones, your execution will have a great moral effect upon the people. Do ye not agree?"

"Your strategy, Harke, is quite brilliant," said Nelson Lee, with real appreciation.

"Ye are bold at the hour of death!" said the Hawk, staring. "Even now my men prepare—and ye shall have a death befitting the occasion." He laughed evilly. "Then, while the warmth still reposes in your lifeless body I shall attack. And victory, I vow, will be easy. For the people will be demoralised, panic-stricken by the fate which has befallen you. Thus shall I regain full control in this cavern."

Seldom had Nelson Lee felt so exasperated. It was an ugly truth, but Simeon Harke was absolutely right. Lee did not doubt that he was to be beheaded—and in full sight of the brave men who had rallied to his call. And

his death would unquestionably make certain their defeat.

"I am not an ungenerous man," went on the Black Hawk, pouring neat rum into the vessels which lay on the table. "Here, Master Lee! Ye shall drink! 'Twill put courage into you for the ordeal which awaits ye."

"I am in no need of such stimulant to give me courage," retorted Lee contemptuously. "A man is no man who cannot face such a cur as you, Simeon Harke, without flinching. You think you have gained your victory. But I would remind you that I am not yet dead; I would further remind you that you have not yet gained your victory over the peoples. Perhaps the course you intend to take will have an opposite effect."

"What mean ye, dog?" demanded the Hawk, with sudden alarm.

"You take it for granted that the people will become demoralised," replied Lee. "How do you know that they will not be filled with a great rage—a burning enthusiasm to take your own blood, in revenge for mine? It occurred to me, Simeon Harke, that you are a man of much conceit. And it is said that pride goeth before a fall."

"Aye, perchance the man is right," said Jonathan Betts uneasily. "'Tis your own idea that the people will crumple up. But will they? Mayhap they will be given added strength——"

"Fool!" snarled the Black Hawk. "You take notice, then, of this traitor's mouthing? He seeks but to delay the issue, and to put doubts into your wooden heads. 'Tis but a ruse to save his own head!"

And before Jonathan Betts and Simon Lane could make any comment, a man appeared in the doorway. He was Richard Moore, another of the Hawk's lieutenants.

"All is ready, Sir Chief!" he said, grinning.

"Then, by my bones, we go!" shouted the Hawk. "Bring the prisoner! See that he is safely chained."

Nelson Lee smiled grimly to himself. It was quite true that he had sought to put doubts into the Black Hawk's mind; but he had never had any real hope that by sowing such seeds he would delay the cruel fate which awaited him.

Heavy chains were brought, and after Lee had been released from the clamps, the chains were festooned around him.

Lee, indeed, was intrigued by the weight and immensity of the chains. Strong cords would have bound him just as efficiently. But no; the Black Hawk was not satisfied until the prisoner had been chained from his shoulders to below his waist. Lee's arms were thus chained to his sides, and he was so weighted down that walking was by no means easy.

He was pushed out of the cabin, hustled down the passage, and up the steps. And when he emerged upon the deck, he saw a great and significant change.

No longer was the Porto Marlo enshrouded in abyssal darkness.

Hundreds of torches were blazing on every part of the decks. They were stuck out of gaps in the ironwork; they were fastened to the masts. The whole scene was lurid with the flickering glare. Smoke arose into the blackness of the upper air, like the fumes from an inferno.

And standing about on the decks, in their scores, were Simeon Harke's men—rough, bearded ruffians, quaintly attired, bare-footed, and all of them with cutlasses hanging at their sides. A cutthroat crew, indeed! Pirates of the old school!

And with a quick, comprehensive look round, Lee saw something else. The distance from the cruiser to the lake shore was not great. He could see the shore distinctly; the light from the torches even showed the rock defence wall of the township. Men had ventured beyond that wall, they were trailing down towards the lake. There were hundreds of them watching—women, too. And on all their faces there were expressions of consternation, of fear, of sadness.

For it was generally known—by now—that Nelson Lee was in the hands of the Black Hawk.

Even in this extremity, Lee was half afraid that the people would attack. If they attempted any such move, they would undoubtedly be defeated. For on this old cruiser Simeon Harke was safe. No attacking force could approach except by boat—and any approaching boat could be sunk with ease from the vessel's decks. There would be an appalling loss of life, and an overwhelming defeat, if the people made any organised attempt to rescue their new leader.

"Bring him forward!" came the Hawk's roaring command.

Lee was keenly aware of his humiliation. His feelings, indeed, were bitter. This, he believed, was the end—not only for him, but for the rebels who had made such a valiant attempt to overthrow the tyrant.

"Listen to me, you scum!" thundered the Black Hawk, going to the vessel's side, and addressing himself directly to the men on shore. "I have Master Lee here, and, so that ye all can see, he is now about to be put to death."

Hawk's men were silent, and Lee distinctly heard a murmur passing through the men on shore. It went back like a wave, it swept through the township. Even the sound of women crying aloud, and sobbing, came floating across the cavern. For sounds, here, travelled strangely, and were echoed and re-echoed.

"This man is to die!" continued the Black Hawk, his great voice booming out. "He shall die as many another has died before him—and before your eyes he shall go to his doom. In this way shall you know of my wrath. And you shall know, too, that when I strike, I strike with deadly effect."

He turned, and gave some sharp orders to his men. Nelson Lee was seized again, and

thrust forward upon the deck until he was amidships on the starboard side. It was this side of the vessel which lay parallel with the shore.

And now Nelson Lee saw something which caused him to start.

He expected to see a great block, and a man standing ready with an enormous axe.

But he was wrong.

What he actually saw was an object which almost caused him to blink with incredulity. An enormous plank, lashed to the rail, and reaching far overside.

And in that moment Nelson Lee fully appreciated the use of the heavy chains—those chains which had been festooned around him. And once again he appreciated the Black Hawk's cunning.

"Well, I have faced death in many forms during my career," Lee told himself. "But never did I expect to meet my end after this fashion!"

He was, in fact, to walk the plank!

Beheading was far too straightforward to please the Black Hawk. That rascal wished to enjoy the spectacle of Lee, stepping out upon that plank, and going to his death before the eyes of all the rebels.

And that Lee would go to his death was inevitable—for he would sink like a stone, and, no matter how he struggled, he knew that he would never be able to free himself from those tightly fastened chains.

"Now, Master Lee, what think ye?" jeered Simeon Harke, striding forward, and gloating insolently into Nelson Lee's face. "'Tis said that death by drowning is pleasant. Ye cannot say that I am a cruel man. I give ye a comfortable end!"

The murmurings from the shore had now increased; an increasing mutter became audible, and it swelled up, and it resolved itself into the shouts of angry men. Tom Swayne and Dr. Otto and a great many others, bolder than the rest, were approaching close to the lake shore, and they were shaking their fists, and giving many other indications of their rage.

"'Twould be as well, Sir Chief, to get it over!" said Jonathan Betts uneasily. "The people grow unruly."

"Let them!" snarled Simeon Harke. "Who cares? Blood and bones! After they have seen this dog go to his death, their fury will collapse, and 'tis like they will surrender without even a fight."

Yet he heeded Betts' words.

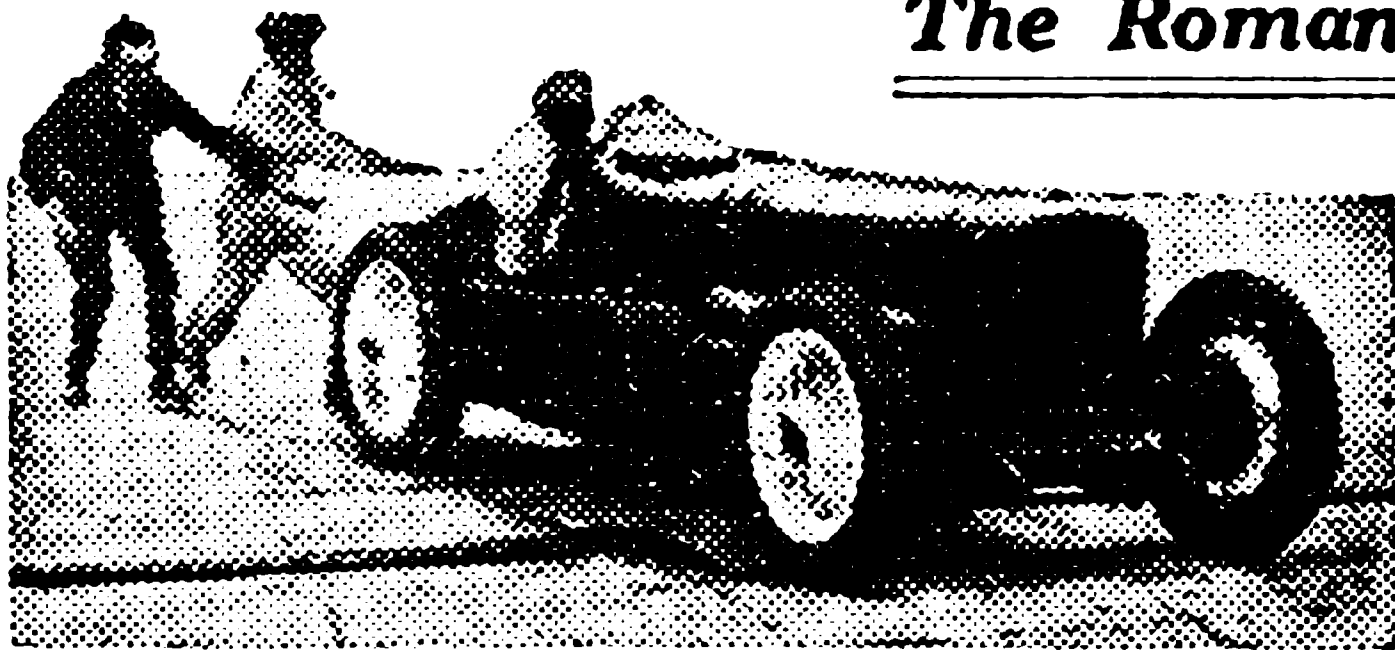
"Now, Master Lee—walk!" he commanded, turning back to Lee. "But wait! Ye shall be blindfolded."

"No!" said Lee. "I will walk as I am."

"Ye will walk as I command!" thundered the Hawk.

He gave orders; men came round, and a great cloth was secured over the upper part of Nelson Lee's face. Then he was set squarely on the great plank, so that he faced

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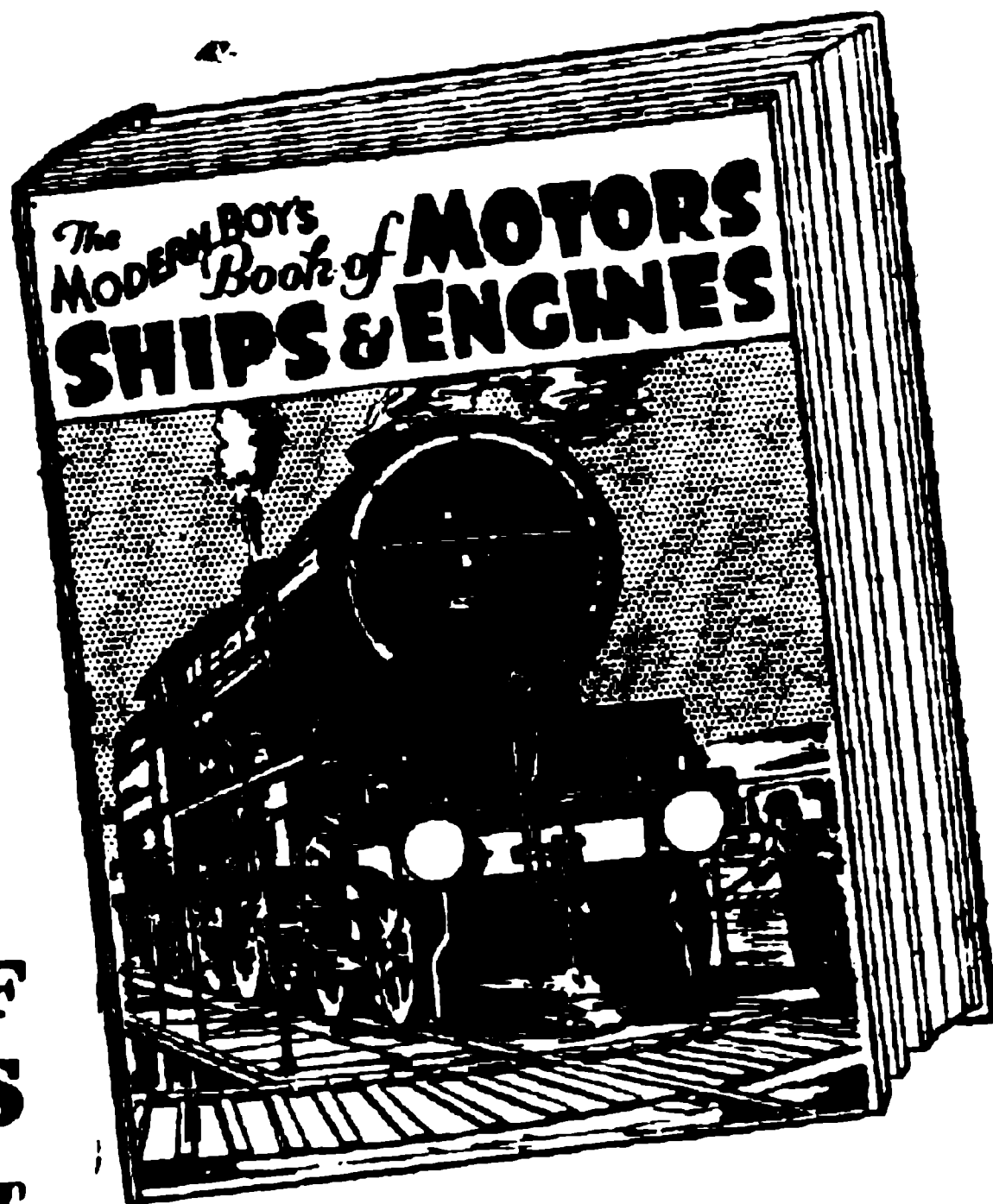


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the full length of it. And, ashore, there came a great hush. Men were watching with horrified fascination.

"Now—walk!" grated the pirate chief.

Only for a moment did Nelson Lee hesitate. And in that brief space many of the pirates jeered and urged him on with cutlasses. They thought that their prisoner was afraid.

Lee gritted his teeth. He must show the People of the Mist that he had no fear of death—even in this hideous form—or they would be lost, indeed. A bold example from him, perhaps, might turn the tide. Already, the people had shown signs that they were angry. Perhaps Nelson Lee's prophesy, uttered down in the cabin, would become true.

He walked straight down the plank—calmly, resolutely, without a falter in his footsteps. And even the pirates themselves gazed upon him with frank and open admiration.

Here was a man!

Without the slightest hesitation Lee paced to the plank's end; the next step he took met with no resistance. He plunged headlong over the end.

"Oh!"

A great, long drawn-out gasp sounded from the multitude on the shore; and from the pirates came a wild shout of exultation—not unmixed with awe.

Splash!

Nelson Lee struck the water; he went straight in, with a great smother of foam spreading out all around.

Then the waters subsided, they grew calmer, bubbles arose—ominous hubbles. Nelson Lee had been carried straight down—down, down to the unknown depths of the great lake.

Simeon Harke flung up a great hand.

"And so all traitors die!" he thundered.

CHAPTER 10.

Umlosi in Action.

"N'KOSE! See!"

Umlosi and Lord Dorrimore, swimming side by side, were still a considerable distance from the rusty old cruiser, with its flaming torches. A considerable distance back, now quite invisible in the gloom, lurked the boat containing Nipper and Handforth. It was lucky, perhaps, that Nipper should know nothing of the grim drama which was being enacted.

"What is it, old friend?" murmured Dorrie.

He ceased swimming, treading water silently. Umlosi, by his side, was almost invisible, owing to the blackness of his skin. The great Kutana chieftain lifted a hand, and pointed.

"They send a man to death, methinks, my father!" he said.

Dorrie, who had been concentrating more upon getting close to the ship, than to see what was taking place, now concentrated his attention. And, for the first time, he saw the great plank—and he saw, too, the bound

figure of a man at the end of the plank, with many other figures in the background.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Dorrie aghast. "Are we livin' in the twentieth century—or the sixteenth? The blighters are makin' somebody walk the plank."

"I have been told, N'Kose, that such is an evil pirate custom," murmured Umlosi. "Wau! For once it seemeth that Umtagati is incapable of exercising that wondrous wizardry of his."

"Umtagati!" almost yelled Dorrie. "You don't mean— Good glory! You're right, old man! It is Lee! Oh, gad!"

Dorrie was dumbfounded. Now that Umlosi had told him, he knew. He recognised that chained figure. Yes, it was chained.—and the significance of the chains hit Lord Dorrimore like a blow. Once Nelson Lee was overside, and plunging down, nothing could save him from death!

In some way, the detective had fallen into the hands of the enemy—and the Black Hawk was murdering him in the true pirate style.

"Come on!" panted Dorrie.

"Nay, N'Kose—'tis a task for me!" said Umlosi. "Do thou hold thyself ready. I go forward."

"That be hanged for a tale!" snapped his lordship. "I'm going with you——"

"Thou art my friend, N'Kose—and this I ask as a favour!" said Umlosi gravely. "Let me be the one. Thinkest thou I shall fail—when the life of Umtagati depends upon my skill?"

And, without waiting for Dorrie to reply, Umlosi was gone. He vanished as though by magic, plunging straight beneath the surface, and swimming with incredible skill. And in that second Lord Dorrimore knew that Umlosi was right. He was the man for this job! He was black, almost invisible against the water, and, moreover, he was wearing practically no clothing. There was not one chance in a thousand that he would be seen.

But Dorrie, with his white skin, would be noticeable at once. Moreover, Umlosi was a far better swimmer—and he had a trick of diving—and swimming under water, which was little short of uncanny.

Only once did Umlosi, as he was approaching, raise his head above the surface. He took one quick look, and he was satisfied.

He was still a dangerous distance away, and Nelson Lee was, at that moment, half way down the plank. Umlosi judged his direction, his distance, and like a creature of the deep he cleaved beneath the surface, striking lower and lower, and diving down diagonally at amazing speed.

He swam on powerfully, and now his eyes were wide open. He was many feet below the surface, invisible.

He felt, rather than saw, some object drop swiftly in front of him, and as it went down it left a trail of bubbles behind.

Lee!

With an almost superhuman effort, Umlosi shot down. His hands clutched, and with joy

in his heart he felt chains under grip—and below the chains something warm and yielding. Umlosi took a firmer hold, and he knew that the weight of Lee's chained body was carrying him downwards, too. But no matter.

He succeeded in placing one strong, mighty arm right round Lee's shoulders. Then he struck out with his legs, and with his free arm. Even now, Umlosi was thinking—scheming. And he remembered the Porto Marlo, lying so near. He remembered the hundreds of men craning over the starboard side.

Umlosi accomplished a great deed.

He forced his way to the surface, his lungs nearly bursting after his long immersion. But, foot by foot, he was winning the battle. He was getting nearer and nearer to the life-giving air. And, what was more, owing to the strategy of his movements, he was coming to the surface on the port side of the cruiser! He had steered Lee right beneath the keel of the vessel.

And that was a matter of supreme importance.

For when, at last, they broke water, they both involuntarily gasped as they took in great gulps of air. But there was no man on that side of the deck to see—or to hear. Every man was on the other side, watching the water. And all were certain that Lee, by this time, was dead.

Yet Nelson Lee was not only conscious, but he had recognised his rescuer—and was amazed.

"Umlosi!" he whispered incredulously.

"'Tis well, Umtagati," murmured Umlosi. "Thou hast passed through a great ordeal, but N'Kose, my father, is near at hand, and soon we will be in safety."

Whilst speaking, he was swimming. No man ever knew what that ordeal meant to Umlosi. Strong as he was, the task of sustaining Lee all but exhausted him. For those chains were a terrible weight. Yet Umlosi swam without a word of complaint. Lee helped as much as he could—by using his legs. And presently, to their relief, they found another figure in the water near to them. By this time they had reached a point some distance ahead of the Porto Marlo's bows, and no eyes were turned in that direction. For a great commotion had broken out upon the shore. The people, infuriated and alarmed by Nelson Lee's fate, were making known their feelings.

"Lee, old man!" came a breathless whisper.

It was Lord Dorrimore. Instantly, he relieved Umlosi of some of the weight. Together they towed their companion away. Right under the Black Hawk's eyes, Nelson Lee had been rescued—and there was something glorious in that. For Lee himself, in spite of his unhappy position, realised just what it meant.

For when he reappeared the effect upon the People of the Mist would be overwhelming; and the effect upon the Black Hawk's crowd would be devastating. Yet never for

a moment did Lee forget that he owed his life to Umlosi.

Dorrie knew that they could do nothing with the chains whilst they were in the water. And Nelson Lee's helplessness went like a knife to the kind-hearted Dorrie's heart. He was quite convinced, without being told anything of the story, that Lee had fallen into the enemy's hands through no carelessness of his own.

It was fortunate that Nipper and Handforth, in their eagerness, disobeyed orders. In fact, they had advanced slightly with the boat, taking the little craft as near as they dared. For they were filled with an overwhelming curiosity to know what was towards.

They saw figures in the water—vague and dim at first in the distance. Nipper took up the night glasses, and his fingers shook as he focussed them. For it seemed to him that there were three figures in the water—and only two had gone away.

"The gov'nor!" he gasped, as he stared through the glasses.

"What!" ejaculated Handforth.

"Don't talk—grab that oar!" panted Nipper. "They've got the gov'nor—and something's wrong, I believe!"

They took the boat rapidly nearer, and Lord Dorrimore, seeing it approach, breathed a sigh of thankfulness. Very soon they were alongside, but it took them some little time to heave Nelson Lee, wetted as he was, aboard. Nipper helped—and Nipper was dumb with horror.

"It's all right, young 'un—I'm not harmed," said Lee softly. "I've had an ugly experience, and I have been nearer to death, to-night, than ever before. It was Umlosi who snatched me back."

Once in the boat the task of removing the chains was not so difficult. And at last Lee was free, and he stretched his limbs luxuriously. He had swallowed very little water, and, in fact, he was practically none the worse for his startling adventure. Never had he been more grim.

"We must go back," he said briskly.

He spoke as though to himself, for he suddenly gave himself a shake, and, turning to Umlosi, took the Kutana chief's hand.

"Old friend, words seem so useless—" he began.

"Thou art surely right, Umtagati," interrupted Umlosi. "I beg of thee to say nought. For is there not much work for us to do?"

And he swept a hand significantly towards the illuminated ship.

"Yes, by James!" said Lee. "The Hawk thinks I'm dead, and he and his hooligans are triumphant. They will now launch an attack upon the township—and the people are full of consternation at my supposed fate. They may be filled with a new strength—a new hatred against the tyrant; but it is more in human nature for them to become demoralised."

He turned abruptly to Dorrie,

"But I am amazed," he went on. "How did you come here, Dorrie—you and these others? I have shown very little of my surprise, but I can assure you that I am more or less bewildered——"

"It's a long story, and it can wait," interrupted Dorrie. "It's enough to tell you that there's a great gully to the north of the island, and, at the bottom of the gully, a tunnel leading through to the big waterfall here, in the cavern. That's how we got through."

"Incredible!" said Lee, staring into the blackness.

"What's more, the Islanders—the people you have always known as Beast Men—are trumps!" continued Dorrie. "They are not half so animal-like as we at first believed. What would you say if I told you that we had a hundred men, strong, waiting for the word to advance?"

"I wouldn't believe you, Dorrie."

"Well, it's true, whether you believe me or not," said his lordship coolly. "These good people are under the command of one Spurius Lartius——"

"What?" ejaculated Lee.

"That's not his real name—that's what I call him," explained Dorrie, grinning. "Anyhow, he's waiting, and we've only got to send Umlosi back, an' he can lead the whole party through the tunnel, and they can join us."

Nelson Lee was agog.

"We're going to give the Black Hawk the shock of his life!" he said happily.

LIGHTS were appearing in the township. Such men as Tom Swayne and Dr. Otto, and kindred spirits—who had been leaders under Nelson Lee's guidance—did their utmost to work the people up to a high pitch of indignation. But they could see, from the very first, that the morale of the defenders was smashed. The man who had led them so ably was dead. The Black Hawk had once again proved his supremacy. What was the good of fighting?

A dread spirit of defeatism overwhelmed them. They were beaten before any battle took place. At the first shock of Lee's supposed death there had been a great outcry, and men had vowed terrible vengeance. But the reaction came almost immediately afterwards. Fear spread like a plague.

It was certain that Simeon Harke would strike. Therefore, some attempt was made to strengthen the defences of the township. All the men retreated behind the rock walls, and weapons were placed handy. A great number of torches were lit—for since the enemy was in full view, it was all the better for the whole cavern, or this section of it, at least, to be lighted.

Simeon Harke himself was drunk with victory—the victory he had already achieved, and the certain victory which was to come.

"We have them, my men!" he gloated. "See, they are but chickens, and can be

trampled underfoot! We shall drive through the township like a storm."

His lieutenants had their orders, and they were filling numbers of smaller vessels with detachments of men. Schooners, brigs, and the like were already near to the Porto Marlo. Men piled into them. Everything was being done with a businesslike grimness. The defenders, who watched the operations, felt more and more that there was no hope for them.

It had been expected by some that the pirates would attempt to reach the shore by small boats. In that case they could easily have been repulsed. But these larger vessels were difficult to deal with. Soon they were coming across the short intervening stretch of water. One after another the vessels struck the rock wall at the lake's edge. Men poured ashore, and soon they were forming themselves into a formidable force. Other ships came; more pirates landed. In a very short space of time the Black Hawk's full array of men stood ready. And now some others joined them, running up from the outskirts of the township. They were deserters—men who wished to throw in their lot with the Hawk. They were traitors!

"Aye, let them come!" shouted the Hawk, when he heard. "Men who come under my banner now shall have my full protection! 'Tis the traitors I desire to punish!"

The attack commenced. Shouting at the top of their voices, running hard, the pirates charged at the rock walls. And so grim did these rough men appear that the People of the Mist watched with an ever-increasing dread.

FROM the waterfall came the reinforcements.

Umlosi had made great haste; and that he had been successful in persuading Spurius Lartius and his men to accompany him was self evident. For the Islanders, nervous during the passage behind the waterfall, were now filled with fresh confidence as they found themselves upon solid ground.

By this time the boat had been rowed back; and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Nipper and Handforth were waiting on the land. Lee knew the geography of the country well, for he had more than once travelled out to this part of the cavern. He had deliberately made himself acquainted with every road.

"This is splendid, Dorrie!" said Lee exultantly. "There is a road running at the foot of this wall which leads straight to the township. We can catch the enemy on the flank—and the effect of such a counter-attack will be overwhelming. Can these Islanders be trusted?"

"I think so; but this will test them," said Dorrie.

"Good! I believe that the Hawk will be completely routed to-night," said Lee. "Now, Dorrie, you know the Islanders better than

I do. Make your signs to them. We must advance. Every second is of value."

And soon the reinforcements were advancing at the double—unseen in the gloom of the cavern, a hundred men, led by a man who was supposed to be dead.

THE first assault upon the township was repulsed.

The pirates, full of confidence, leapt at the walls rashly, and they were met by a fierce resistance. These defenders, finding themselves face to face with the great crisis, battled gamely. All along the wall the attackers were beaten off; many were injured, and left groaning on the ground. Others fell back, baffled.

But the Black Hawk himself, seeing how things were going, rallied his men. He knew

"On—on!" roared the Black Hawk. "We have them, men!"

In the uncertain light the whole scene was fantastic. Torches were flaming here and there, and the Porto Marlo, now deserted, was as brilliant as ever.

"By my bones!" screamed Jonathan Betts suddenly.

"What ails ye, fool?" asked the Hawk, startled by the man's tone.

"Look, Sir Chief!" croaked the other. "Faith, 'tis a ghost!"

Simeon Harke swung round. Then he went livid. From a wide road which led round from the great wall of the cavern, a great body of men approached. They were strange, fearsome-looking fellows, and all of them were armed with great weapons.

"Bones and blood!" gasped the Hawk.

AMAZING! STUPENDOUS!

"THE CLAWS of the HAWK!"

Dealing with the Sensational Adventures of Nelson
Lee & Co., on the Island Above the Clouds.

ALSO

COCK O' THE WALK!

Which tells further of Handforth's amazing reign as Skipper of the Remove
IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

that there had been a blunder in the first place. The drive should have taken effect in one spot.

"Fools—fools!" he thundered. "Smash the walls down—make a breach! After that ye can pour through, and in a hand-to-hand fight against the rabble ye will surely prevail."

Reorganised, the pirates made another great attack. And this time, under Simeon Harke's personal leadership, they charged grimly at one place. And instead of attempting to climb the walls, they took great timbers, ramming the walls with these and smashing the rocks down. Very soon a great breach was made, and on the other side the Settlers backed, filled with consternation.

In another minute the enemy would pour through that gap; and then, within the defence lines, the battle could only end in one way.

"The Beast Men! Here, in the cavern!"

"Nay, I mean not them!" howled Jonathan Betts. "The man in the lead! 'Tis Master Lee himself!"

Then it was that Simeon Harke uttered a cry of terror. Without doubt the man in the lead of this force, which attacked from the flank, was Nelson Lee. And Nelson Lee had gone to his death at the bottom of the lake!

"On—on!" came Lee's clear, ringing voice.

If the effect upon Simeon Harke was devastating, the effect upon his men was ten times more so. They did not even stay to make any fight of it. There was a great rush, and, screaming and howling, the pirates fled. Not a man waited to get into a boat. They leapt into the lake and swam for their lives. And from the township came great cheers.

Once again Nelson Lee had saved the lost community from disaster.

THE END.

"Hail, Handforth, Lord Of The Remove—Monarch Of All!"

COCK O' THE WALK!



Edward Oswald Handforth, the new Remove Skipper, proceeds to throw his weight about, and show the school in general, and the Remove in particular, just how things should be done!

The Order of the Boot!

ARNOLD McCLURE, of the St. Frank's Remove, looked up and groaned.

"Here he comes!" he said dismally.

"Eh? Who?" said Church, looking up from his book. "Oh, Handy? Bother him! It's Sunday evening, and he can't start any of his rot now. Shove a bit more coal on the fire, Mac, old man!"

Study D, in the Ancient House, was looking very cosy and bright. It was just that hour of Sunday evening when the juniors were at liberty to amuse themselves quietly in their own quarters—and reading was the general habit since, of course, any sort of game was prohibited, and lessons were forgotten.

A cheerful fire was crackling in the grate, and a row of chestnuts were roasting on the top bar. Church and McClure were lounging at their ease, each with a book. It was a picture of perfect contentment.

The door opened. Edward Oswald Handforth strode in—and peace slipped out.

"Oh!" he said, frowning at his chums. "Taking things pretty easily, aren't you?"

"Why not?" asked Church. "Isn't it Sunday evening?"

Handforth walked round the little room, the frown still upon his rugged brow. His preoccupation was no sudden phase, for he had been more or less absent-minded through-

out the day. He came to a halt at last, and turned his attention upon his chums.

"Yes, you'll have to clear out," he said firmly.

"Who—us?" asked McClure, looking up.

"Yes—you!"

"Clear out?"

"That's what I said," nodded Handforth.

"What for? And when?"

"This evening—now!" replied Edward Oswald resolutely. "Sorry, and all that, but a Form captain can't be bothered with two other fellows in his study. A skipper needs a room entirely to himself. It's only right, too. No Form captain can attend to his duties properly if he's interrupted. So you'll both have to get into other quarters."

Much as Church and McClure desired to continue their reading with an air of indifference, this pronouncement so startled them that they lowered their books as though actuated by a hidden, connected spring.

"Get into other quarters?" repeated Church, staring.

"You're mad!" said McClure.

"I've got it all fixed," said Handforth calmly. "There's over an hour before supper, and you can get busy at once. Take all your kit and clear out into Study J. Captain's orders!"

"Captain's orders be blowed!" snorted Church indignantly. "Do you think we're

going to be messed about and chucked out of our study just because you get a silly, fat-headed whim?"

"Is that the way to talk to your captain?" roared Handforth.

"It's the way to talk to a dotty, swelled-headed chump!" retorted Church. "I'm talking to him, too! You were made skipper last night—by a giddy fluke—and you can't even let Sunday go by without throwing your weight about!"

"And it's like your nerve to give us the order of the boot!" snapped McClure.

Handforth clenched his fists.

"Better go easy!" warned Church. "Sunday evening, remember!"

"You—you tricky rotters!" said Handforth bitterly. "You know I can't chuck you out, and kick up a din, so you're taking advantage of me. Any scrap on a Sunday evening means a gating for the week, at least. But you're going, my lads, all the same!"

"But why?" asked McClure. "What on earth for? I say, Handy, old man, chuck it, you know! Goodness knows, we don't want and squabbling! Be sensible, and give up this imbecile idea."

Edward Oswald Handforth glared.

"I don't want to be nasty," he said coldly. "I don't want us to have any breach, or rift in the flute——"

"Rift in the lute, you mean?"

"I don't want any quibbles from you, Walter Church!" snapped Handforth. "What's the difference between a lute and a flute, anyhow?"

"Not much, I suppose," grinned Church. "Only one's a reed instrument, and the other's got strings, like a guitar——"

"They're both musical instruments, aren't they!" roared Handforth. "Why make a fuss over a string or a reed? I've got nothing against you chaps, as chaps. You're my chums. We're all pally. Good friends, eh?"

"That's the stuff," said Church, nodding.

"Now we can go on reading," said McClure, with relief.

"At the same time, you can't stay in this study," went on Handforth firmly. "A Form captain needs plenty of room—plenty of space. And there's the question of dignity, too. How can a Form captain be dignified if two other fellows share his study? No! He's got to have a room entirely to himself. So you chaps have got to quit!"

Church nodded slowly.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "But what's the good of a tiny room like this for a Form captain? It's too insignificant, Handy! Why don't you let Mac and I stay, and you clear out?"

"Topping!" said McClure. "I should make the small lecture-hall into a study, Handy—it'll just about fit your dignity."

For a moment Handforth looked intent, then he frowned.

"I didn't ask for any of your funny sarcasm," he said gruffly. "This is my study, and this is where I stay! You're both clearing out!"

"But Study J is Jarrow's room!" protested McClure. "He might have something to say——"

"If Jarrow has something to say, I'll deal with him!" interrupted Handforth. "When the Form captain gives orders, those orders have got to be obeyed. Understand? Obeyed—to the letter!"

"Or else death follows?" asked Church tartly.

"Yes! Eh? I mean——" Handforth paused, reddening. "Still trying to be funny, eh?" he went on. "I don't expect much else from you fellows—being my chums, you naturally presume. But now that I'm Form captain, there's going to be no favouritism!"

"Oh, goodness!" groaned McClure. "Form captain! Form captain! Form captain! We've had those giddy words dinned into our ears for twenty-four solid hours! Anybody might think you'd been made Prime Minister, or crowned King of the Remove, or something! A Form captain is only an ordinary chap, after all!"

"A very ordinary chap!" said Church pointedly.

"A Form captain has duties to perform!" said Handforth, with dignity.

"Then why not perform a few, instead of gassing all day?" growled Church, with rising indignation. "The Form allowed you to hold an election—the chaps spoofed you up to the neck—and gave you all the votes. Then Crowell came along and made the election official. You know as well as I do that you're only Form captain by a mere accident. And now the Remove is pretty sick!"

"I don't wonder at it," said McClure. "Look what it's saddled itself with!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"It's no good trying to be kind to you chaps," he said thickly. "Are you clearing out of this study, or shall I use force? I don't want to disturb the peace of Sunday evening, but duty is duty! As skipper, I've got to have this room to myself. That's final! So you can collect all your goods and chattels, and shift into Study J. I'll go along and see Jarrow now, and fix it up."

"If he objects, I suppose you'll sentence him to penal servitude for seven years?" asked Church sourly. "Or cast him down into the deepest dungeon? Who do you think you are, anyhow?"

"I'm Form captain!"

"Not the Grand Vizier, by any chance?" snapped Church.

"Or the Lord High Everything-In-The-World?" asked Mac.

"Go on!" said Handforth. "I don't mind admitting I was a little bit worried about turning you chaps out—but my mind's easy now. I've had nothing but insults for the last ten minutes, so the sooner you get out of here the better. I don't even recognise you as my chums any more!"

Church shook his head, and turned to McClure.

"By the way," he said deliberately, "Where's old Handy?"

"Eh?" said McClure, staring.

"We haven't seen the old chap for twenty-four hours," said Church. "And I'm blessed if I can understand what's become of him."

"But—but——" said McClure.

"Handy vanished last night—immediately after the election," said Church. "We haven't seen a sign of him since."

Handforth found his voice.

"You silly fathead, I'm here!" he said, in astonishment.

"Eh?" exclaimed Church. "Who's this? Not Handy, I know!"

"Not Handy!" gasped Edward Oswald. "I'm myself, aren't I?"

"Goodness knows who you are!" said Church coldly. "You're a stranger to me, anyhow—a flint-hearted, self-important jack-ass with a swollen head! Good old Handy hasn't any of those rotten qualities!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Mac, scenting the drift.

Handforth saw the idea, too.

"Chuck it!" he growled. "I'm sorry, but now that I'm Form captain, I've got to sink my own personality, and devote myself entirely to my duties. A skipper has no time to devote to his chums. He's got to be hard-hearted—he's got to be a worker for the general good. I'll fix up with Jarrow."

He strode out and his chums breathed deeply.

"Oh, the madman!" growled Church. "Just because he's skipper, he thinks he's a sort of king! He's only got to give an order, and the whole Remove will fly to obey it! What can we do with the idiot?"

"Obey him!" retorted McClure. "By jingo, we'll take him at his word, too! He doesn't know when he's well off—but he'll know soon enough—after we've gone! We'll take all our things—everything we own. We'll leave him absolutely to himself, and let him potter along until he comes back to us, begging us to return!"

And, feeling much more comfortable, they prepared to leave their old study, with its many binding associations. But they were consoled by the thought that their absence would not be very prolonged.

Handforth on the Job.

TUBBS, the Ancient House page-boy, softly opened the dormitory door and peeped inside. The school clock was just chiming out six-thirty, and Tubbs was only half awake—having turned out, in fact, barely ten minutes earlier.

"Lummy!" he muttered. "It seems a shame to do it!"

He crept into the dormitory, looked at the sleeping forms of Handforth & Co., and then glanced out of the window. By no stretch of the imagination could the morning be called a cheerful one. The sky was so heavily overcast that full daylight had not yet come. half a gale was whistling round the school buildings, and an intermittent rain was rattling against the windows.

Tubbs yawned, and shook his head.

"Still, orders is orders, and Master Handforth might git wild if I don't obey 'em," he told himself. "I s'pose I'd better do it!"

He went to Edward Oswald's bed, seized the Remove skipper by the shoulders, and shook him. Handforth, who was lying flat on his back with his mouth open, gave a grunt, and lunged upwards and outwards with his right. Tubbs caught a terrific swipe on the side of his head.

"Crikey!" he gasped, staggering away.

"Refusing to obey orders, eh?" mumbled Handforth fiercely. "All right—take that! I'll show you whether I'm to be defied or not!"

"Crikey!" said Tubbs.

It was obvious that sheer disaster would follow unless he carried out his instructions. For Handforth was sloshing people in his dreams, even.

"Wake up, Master Handforth!" said Tubbs, reaching forward and grabbing the pillow. "It's 'alf-past six. You told me to lug you out, even if I 'ad to empty the water-jug over you."

Handforth drowsily opened his eyes, and groped for the missing pillow. Then he caught sight of Tubbs, sat up and glared.

"Gimme that pillow, you young fathead!" he said thickly.

"Time to git up, Master Handforth——"

"Rats gimme that pillow!"

"Your orders, sir, was to git you out at all costs——"

"Are you going to give me that pillow, or shall I smash you?" roared Handforth, leaping out of bed. "Of all the confounded nerve! Barging into my bed-room, and pinching——"

"But you told me——"

Tubbs broke off with a wild howl, for Handforth, without compunction, had delivered a fearful punch on the chest which knocked the page-boy over in a heap. He struck the floor with a thud, and Handforth climbed back into bed.

"Now you can clear off!" he said grimly.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Tubbs, struggling to his feet. "It ain't no good messin' about, Master Handforth. I forgives you freely for knockin' me down, because you ain't rightly awake. But you've got to git up. Them's your own orders, sir, an' I ain't leavin' this room until you're hup!"

He approached the bed warily. Handforth had snuggled down, still heavy with sleep, and totally forgetful of the order he had given overnight. Tubbs hesitated. Under the circumstances, he would be justified, perhaps, in abandoning this perilous business.

But Tubbs was a youth of stubborn purpose.

"Orders," he muttered. "is orders. Besides, Master 'Andforth promised me a bob if I got 'im out. And a bob's a bob, after all's said an' done!"

He looked round, spotted a large sponge, and set his jaw. He crossed the room, filled the sponge with water, and went back to Handforth's bed. With one lightning movement, he yanked the bedclothes back, slopped

the sponge with a fearful squelch into Handforth's face, and made a lightning dive for the door.

"Gug-gug— What the— Oooooooh!"

Handforth sat up, shivering. He gave a gasp of sheer horror. The neck of his pyjamas was open, and the sponge had suddenly slipped down. An expression of dazed dread came over him as the sponge slithered icily down his chest.

"Help!" he gasped wildly. "What the— Oooooooh!"

In making a wild grab at his chest, he had emptied the sponge, and he leapt out of bed with such speed that the floor seemed to rock.

"Who—who did this?" he asked ominously.

"I did, sir," said Tubbs, trembling.

"You!"

"Yessir!"

"Why, of all the confounded pieces of nerve—"

"Your orders. Master Handforth!"

"My orders?"

"Yessir!"

Handforth gave a gulp, and dimly remembered.

"By George!" he panted. "I do seem to recollect. But I didn't tell you to drown me, you lunatic!"

"It's gorn 'alf-past six, sir," said Tubbs, with one foot out in the corridor. "I shook you up, sir, an' pinched your pillow, but it wasn't no good. Sorry if you're wet, Master 'Andforth. But orders is orders."

Handforth was so wide awake now that he had full grasp of the situation. And his expression changed. It pleased him to think that Tubbs had obeyed him so implicitly. He tossed the sponge aside, and grinned.

"Good man!" he said approvingly. "That's what I like to see—obedience to instructions. You'll get half-a-crown for this, Tubby, as soon as I get down. Always obey orders, and you'll be all right!"

"Yessir!" said Tubbs, with relief.

He vanished, and Handforth's attention was attracted by a series of watery gurgles on his immediate flank. He glanced round, and found that he had carelessly flung the sponge into McClure's face. And McClure was in the process of waking up as he breathed through the wet mass.

"Topping!" said Handforth cheerfully.

He gave the sponge a squeeze, and expelled the rest of the water.

"Ouch!" gasped McClure, sitting up. "Hi! You—you dangerous maniac! I'm drenched! What's the idea of—"

"Time to get up!" interrupted Handforth curtly.

McClure stared dizzily at the wet morning.

"It's pouring with rain!" he snapped. "Besides, it's hardly light yet! The rising-bell hasn't gone—"

"It's half-past six—and we've got to be on Little Side by seven," put in Handforth.

"Practice. I'm captain now, and there's going to be no slacking. Practice every

morning from seven until eight. That's the new order."

McClure goggled.

"But—but we can't practise in the pouring rain!" he protested.

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because— Well, dash it, it's not done!" said McClure crossly. "People don't go out in a downpour and practise football. Get back to bed, you chump, and wait until rising-bell."

"I'm not going to allow the weather to interfere with my prearranged plans!" said Handforth, staring out of the window. "A confounded nerve—that's what it is. Disgusting!"

He spoke as though the elements had offered him a deadly insult by sending this rain on the very first morning of his captaincy. It certainly was a bit thick. The elements couldn't have known whom they were offending.

Much as McClure disliked it, he was forced to turn out. And Church, being a member of the team also, was ruthlessly tipped out of bed, and ordered to dress. He would have been tipped out, just the same, whether he was a member of the team or not. Handforth was quite impartial in these little matters. However, after they were all dressed, they felt better. It is always the first minute or two that feels the worst.

"A fat lot of good us going out to practise on our own!" said Church gloomily. "It would be a different thing if the whole team was turning out—"

"The whole team is turning out," interrupted Handforth calmly.

"Why, have you arranged it?"

"I'm going to arrange it—now!" retorted Edward Oswald, a grim, sinister note creeping into his voice. "We'll take Tregellis-West and Watson first. You go round to the dormitories, and give the fellows a preliminary tip. If they're not getting up when I arrive, they'll know something!"

The next half-hour in the Remove section of the Ancient House was hectic. Wild, animal cries proceeded from dormitory after dormitory. Fellows appeared with tangled hair and puffy noses. Thick ears were general. A kind of tornado had passed through the Remove sleeping quarters—and, incidentally, the tornado had now swept out, and was converging upon the West House, to deal with that section of the Remove. The echoes of the gathering storm could just be heard.

When Edward Oswald Handforth made up his mind to a certain course, he went straight on with it irrespective of rebuffs and setbacks. Thus it came about that all the footballers of the Remove were on Little Side by seven-fifteen; the rain had been kind enough to ease off considerably by that time. True, Handforth was of very little use, being exhausted. His knuckles, too, were painful and swollen, and his features were more than usually rugged.

But he was triumphant. He had gained his end. Not that the rest of the team had tamely knuckled under. Had they chosen, they could have defied Handforth and utterly ignored him. But it saved an enormous amount of trouble to pander to his whims. He had an unfortunate habit of using his right with devastating effect, and the only way of checking him was to humour his mood. As Reggie Pitt remarked, life was very short, and footer practice, after all, was a worthy object.

"It's all very well for fellows like us," he said, as he chatted with Fullwood and Jack Grey and De Valerie. "Handy can't very well wipe us up if we disobey his orders. But he can wipe up lots of the others."

"He's been doing it for half an hour!" said Fullwood indignantly.

"That's why we've got to adopt a pacifist mood," replied Reggie, nodding. "For the sake of the weaker ones, we've got to humour the ass. But how's it going to all end?"

"Goodness knows!" said Jack Grey. "Mr. Crowell has forbidden us to hold another election until the end of the Term, so we're saddled with this prizefighter until then! He'll create a revolution before he's done!"

"You ought to be skipper," said De Valerie, looking at Pitt.

"Rats!" grinned Reggie. "Handy's the captain, and it's our duty to support him."

"What?"

"Fact!" said Reggie.

"But you don't mean that we've got to accept him seriously?"

"There'll be a pile of unnecessary trouble if we don't," replied Pitt. "Besides, it's only fair. Give the man a chance! Handy's one of the best in the world—a bit too hot-headed, and a bit too aggressive—but, still, he's one of the best in the world. Let's give him a free hand, to show what he can do."

"H'm," mused Fullwood. "There's something in it. One way and another, we ought to get quite a lot of fun out of Handy's captaincy, too."

"Exactly!" nodded Reggie. "Give him a free hand—and if we don't get a good few laughs, my name isn't first cousin to a coal-mine!"

Handforth Outlines His Policy.

DICK HAMILTON, the real captain of the Remove, was away.

That, in a nutshell, was the reason for Edward Oswald Handforth's present feverish activity. The Remove had amused themselves by electing him as a joke—and Mr. Crowell had amused himself by telling the Remove that the election was valid. This had been on the previous Saturday evening, and the Remove was just recovering.

For Handforth, as a skipper, was an unknown quantity. But not completely unknown. The most unimaginative fellow in the Form knew, at least, one thing: Trouble—with a capital T—was an absolute certainty!

Dick Hamilton wasn't the only absentee. Mr. Nelson Lee, the schoolmaster of the St. Frank's, was also away. In fact, they were both engaged upon an important investigation, and there were rumours already floating about that they wouldn't return for some time.

And Handforth was the official skipper in the meantime!

So the Remove's dismay was not without cause. Quite a number of fellows expected to get some fun out of the affair—but others were not quite so optimistic. Forrest & Co., for example, had the wind up. They were young gentlemen of questionable habits, and they had a lurking fear that Handforth would officiously pay them marked attention now that he was in a position of power.

By breakfast-time that morning, the Remove was somewhat exhausted. Not only the footballers, but all the other members of the Form, had had it firmly impressed upon them that Edward Oswald Handforth was the captain, that he was to be obeyed, and that if he wasn't obeyed, there would be loads of trouble.

A few dare-devils had utterly refused to acknowledge Handforth's authority, and they were dare-devils no longer. Their time was fully occupied in nursing their bruises.

Handforth wasn't a bully. He never took advantage of a weaker fellow. But when anybody defied him, his methods were crisp and businesslike. They generally had about ten seconds to put up their hands—and ten minutes to recover, after they had failed to put up their hands. His methods with the weaklings were equally drastic. He calmly yanked them off their feet, placed them across his knee, and spanked them. It wasn't even necessary to inflict any physical pain. The humiliation was quite enough to guarantee obedience thereafter.

Indeed, Handforth's methods were so swift that by breakfast-time the Remove was in a state of feverish uncertainty. The "heads" of the Form—fellows like Pitt and Fullwood and Tommy Watson—had nothing to fear from the cyclonic skipper. They were highly amused by the whole affair. But the others, the rank and file were rapidly becoming rebellious.

And Handforth was fairly in his glory.

The hefty ones he challenged to instant combat, and dared them to question his authority. They didn't question it for long.

Of course, Handforth's idea of his authority, and the Remove's idea of his authority, were two totally different things. The captaincy had got into Edward Oswald's blood, and he seemed to imagine that he was not only a Form captain, but a Housemaster and a headmaster and an Inquisitor all rolled into one. He let the Remove plainly see that he was a Power, a Law, a Dictator.

The Remove, quite naturally, regarded their captain as just one of themselves—a fellow who only differed from them in the sense that he was in a position to call meetings, select footer teams, and so forth. Such mild



The school page suddenly jerked the bedclothes off Handforth, and thrust the sponge of cold water full in his face. "Orders is orders!" muttered Tubbs.

methods were bordering on the ludicrous to a fire-eater of Handforth's type.

"You'd better understand, once and for all, that I'm in charge!" said Handforth, as he addressed a group of Removites from the Ancient House steps. "I don't want to be nasty—peace is my motto—but if any fathead wants a scrap, he can have one!"

The fatheads declined the offer.

"You've only got to question my full authority, and you can have as many rounds as you like—with or without the gloves," went on Handforth calmly. "Now that I'm skipper, I mean to make all sorts of drastic alterations. There's been too much laxity. There's been too much go-as-you-please stuff in the past. From now onwards, the Remove is going to win a name for itself. I'm going to lead it to glory after glory."

"You're more likely to come a fearful cropper!" said somebody.

"Who said that?" roared Handforth, glaring.

"I did!" snapped Doyle of the West House.

"Oh, did you?"

"Yes, I did!"

"Then you'd better understand, Harold Doyle, that you'll come a cropper before I shall!" snorted Handforth, striding down the steps and pushing his way through the crowd. "I can't allow my dignity to be slighted by

an ass like you! Are you going to put 'em up, or shall I biff you?"

Doyle was quite as big as Handforth, and he was well known for his hasty temper. He glared.

"Biff me—if you can!" he retorted hotly.

"Nothing easier!" said Handforth.

Crash!

He swept Doyle's guard aside with contemptuous ease, and landed one of his special drives on Doyle's nose. Doyle sat down in the wet gravel with a squelch.

"And that's the way I'm going to treat everybody who talks out of the back of their necks!" said Handforth, looking round. "Does somebody else want to have a shot? Mind you, I'm not quarrelsome—I want everybody to understand that I'm wholeheartedly for the Remove. Trust me, and you'll have more japes this term than you've ever had before—more victories than you can dream of."

"Good old Handy!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Let 'em know who you are!"

"I'm going into my office now—and I don't want to be disturbed," said Handforth curtly.

"Your office?"

"My office!"

"I didn't know you had an office!" said Pitt.

"Study D really," explained Handforth. "My headquarters, you know. I maintain that a Form captain ought to have a proper office—all to himself. I'm going to draft out my plans for the day. If any idiot comes and disturbs me, he'll regret it!"

"Supposing a sensible chap comes?" asked Fullwood, grinning.

"That's impossible!" retorted Handforth. "Any chap who comes to Study D during the next half-hour won't be sensible!"

He turned on his heel and strode into the Ancient House.

"I'm dashed if the captaincy isn't acting like a tonic on him," chuckled Pitt. "He's getting smart in his old age! Shall we go along in about five minutes and beard the lion in his den?"

"'Safety first' is my motto," said Fullwood, shaking his head. "I'm ready for a scrap any old time—but why wave a red flag to a bull?"

By Appointment Only!

GOOD gad!" Archie Clenthorpe, strolling along the Remove passage, came to a halt, and screwed his monocle firmly into his eye. He stood there, elegant and immaculate, an expression of mild astonishment on his aristocratic features.

"Good gad!" he repeated, staring.

He was just opposite Study D, and his attention had been attracted by a large square of cardboard which was pinned to the upper panels. And the card bore the following legend:

"CAPTAIN'S OFFICE."

And immediately below this inscription, which was in huge letters, ran three further lines in small characters:

"STRICTLY PRIVATE."

No Admittance Except On Business.

INTERVIEWS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

By Order, Ed. O. HANDFORTH (Capt.)."

"Good gad!" said Archie for the third time.

"What are you gadding about, old man?" asked Alf Brent as he joined his study chum. "Hallo! My hat! What's all this?"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Just, as a matter of fact, what I was going to say. You absolutely took the jolly old words out of the vocal department. What, I mean, as it were, is it?"

"The silly fathead!" breathed Brent. "He seems to think he's the King of St. Frank's, or something. By appointment only, by Jingo! That's a bit thick, isn't it?"

"Thick?" said Archie. "I mean, what? It strikes me, laddie, as being dashed

mottled, not to say hovering near the edge! Lurid times in the offing, what?"

"Oh, I expect he'll get over it in a day or two!" said Alf.

They passed along to the lobby, and found Church and McClure chatting with the Onions brothers, who had just come over from the West House with a cast-iron rumour.

"According to all I've heard, it's an absolute fact," said Johnny Onions.

"Well, I shan't be sorry," growled Church. "A new Housemaster will probably keep Handy in check, and stop a lot of his tommy rot!"

"New Housemaster?" asked Brent.

"Not absolutely really!" observed Archie. "I mean, I thought the jolly old lad from across the way was going to do the good old honours."

"That's what I thought," said Johnny Onions. "But it seems that the work will be too heavy for Mr. Stokes. After all, two Houses in the hands of one man is a bit stiff."

"But is this official?" asked Alf Brent.

"Well, I didn't hear it from Mr. Stokes, if that's what you mean?" smiled Johnny. "As a matter of fact, Bertie got it from somebody in the Fifth. But, naturally, it's only a rumour as yet."

A shadow appeared in the doorway.

"Rumours again!" said a cheery voice. "You're just as bad at St. Frank's as we are at the River House. What's the new one?"

Hal Brewster, the genial leader of the "Commoners" of the River House School, had left his bicycle at the foot of the steps, and now strode into the lobby. He shed his macintosh and shook hands.

"Filthy morning!" he observed. "So you've got a new Housemaster coming, eh?"

"That's it," said Church, nodding. "We can do with him, too! I only hope it turns out to be really true. We haven't got a Housemaster at present, and Mr. Stokes hardly ever comes across from the West House. And Handy is throwing his weight about without anybody to check him."

"We're in the midst of troublous times!" said Reggie Pitt as he joined the group. "Cheerio, Hal! What brings you out on this wild and tempestuous morning?"

"Wild and tempestuous is right!" said McClure. "It's just as wild and just as tempestuous indoors as it is out! Thank goodness Handy has locked himself in his study until first lesson!"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Brewster, staring.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Pitt sadly.

"Heard what?"

"That Handy's our new skipper!" was the staggering reply.

(Further chapters of this Great School Story are included in next week's programme. Don't miss them!)

Your Editors Weekly Chat With His Pals!

MY Dear Chums,—

The principal feature of my correspondence lately has been the number of readers who have written to say that they regard Mr. E. S. Brooks' latest series, "The Island Above The Clouds," as one of the very finest he has ever penned. I think they are right, too. The author has worked his idea out very carefully indeed, and when the series ends with next week's story, I think you will all agree that these yarns are the sort that stick in the memory for many a long day.

Mr. Brooks is at present at work on another short series which will, I know, be immensely popular when it appears in a week or two's time. Then a really great Christmas series has been worked out, so you see I am keeping E. S. B. really busy just now. So rally round, all you "Brooks fans," and give the Old Paper the benefit of your active support, please!

Talking of treats, I suppose you have all seen the wonderful **FREE GIFTS** that are being given away in our Companion Papers, the "Ranger," "Magnet," and "Modern Boy"? If you haven't, then let me tell you you are missing something **GOOD**! These Free Gifts are in the form of Topping Coloured Picture-Stamps. In all 144 stamps will be given away, 6 each week in each of the three papers. This record-breaking Free Gift Scheme has set the whole world talking—see that you participate in it.

A treasure-trove of stories, colour plates and pictures for 2/6! A book that will be an everlasting companion. This is a fitting description to "THE POPULAR BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES," now on sale at all newsagents and booksellers. There is no other annual on the market that gives such value for money. For half-a-crown it is an extraordinary bargain. In it you will find tales of thrilling adventures at home and abroad, stories of the Wild West, motor-racing, and of the sea. I fully recommend it.

Other annuals which I advise you to buy are:

"The **HOLIDAY** Annual," price 6/-.

"The **HOBBY** Annual," price 6/-.

"The **MODERN BOY'S** Annual," price 6/-.

"The **New ZOO** Annual," price 6/-.

and

"Every Boy's Book of **MOTORS, SHIPS** and **ENGINES**," price 7/6.



Letters to the Editor should be addressed to **NELSON LEE LIBRARY**, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

READERS' PRIZE JOKES.

Traveller: "What's the matter with that dog?"

Rustic: "Laziness."

Traveller: "How's that?"

Rustic: "He's sitting on a whistle, and he's too lazy to get off!"

(J. Whitehouse, Glenside Villa, Blackberry Hill, Fishponds, Bristol.—A penknife.)

"Why on earth do you keep looking round at the coat-rack?" asked a City man who was dining with a friend from the country.

"I am keeping an eye on my overcoat," was the reply.

"Ridiculous! You don't see me continually looking round there."

"Well, there's no need for you to do so: your coat went about ten minutes ago!"

(C. Parker, 19, Mackenzie Street, Brunswick, Melbourne, Australia.—A grand prize.)

Office-boy: "Could I have the afternoon off, sir, to go to my grandmother's funeral?"

Employer: "My boy, be economical. Don't waste your grandmothers so early in the season; save them for the Cup-ties!"

(W. Bonham, 8, Hyllon Terrace, North Shields, Northumberland.—A pocket wallet.)

First boy: "I know a chap that's so tall he can light a cigarette off a lamp post!"

Second boy: "That's nothing! I know a fellow who is so tall he has to go on his knees when he wants to take some money out of his trousers pocket."

(W. Davis, 12, Park Road, Hull.—A penknife.)

PEN PALS.

Gilbert Hicks, 25, Prowse Street, West Perth, Western Australia, wants correspondents.

Jack Fecak, Morphet Vale, South Australia, wants pen friends.

H. Peett, 6, Bulderton Buildings, Hart Street, Grosvenor Square, London, W.1, wants correspondents.

William G. Clements, Elgin Street, Berwick, Victoria, Australia, wants to hear from stamp collectors.

Miss Irene Rowston, Bretagne, Cleo Crescent, Old Cleo, Grimsby, Lines., wants girl correspondents in America, Australia, New Zealand and Africa.

(Continued on next page.)

Howard Holt, 31, Bryant Street, Lighthouse Hill, Newcastle, N.S.W., **Australia**, wants correspondents interested in coins, stamps, swimming and running.

R. M. Bernott, 39, Swift Avenue, Dulwich, **South Australia**, wants correspondents interested in native curios, Malaya, Java, China, etc.

Marcellus Pinto, c/o P.O. Box, 16, Georgetown, Demerare, **British Guiana**, wants correspondents.

Cliff Alex Foster, 23, Burnside Road, Chadwell Heath, **Essex**, wants correspondents interested in boxing, football and gym work.

Douglas Luntley, 12, Cardigan Terrace, Kirkstall Road, Leeds, **Yorks.**, wants a correspondent in any foreign country.

D. N. Patterson, c/o Mrs. A. Morkel, 1072, Arcadia Street, Hatfield, Pretoria, Transvaal, **South Africa**, wants correspondents in England, France and Australia.

M. Cannon, Claremont, 203, Rose Street, Darlington, Sydney, N.S.W., **Australia**, wants correspondents; over 17.

Harold Rosenberg, 34, Rokeby Street, Bellevue East, Johannesburg, Transvaal, **South Africa**, wants correspondents; 16-17.

Abd-el-Rahman Kamel, 41, Mohamed Hassan Street, Kolali, Cairo, **Egypt**, wants to hear from readers.

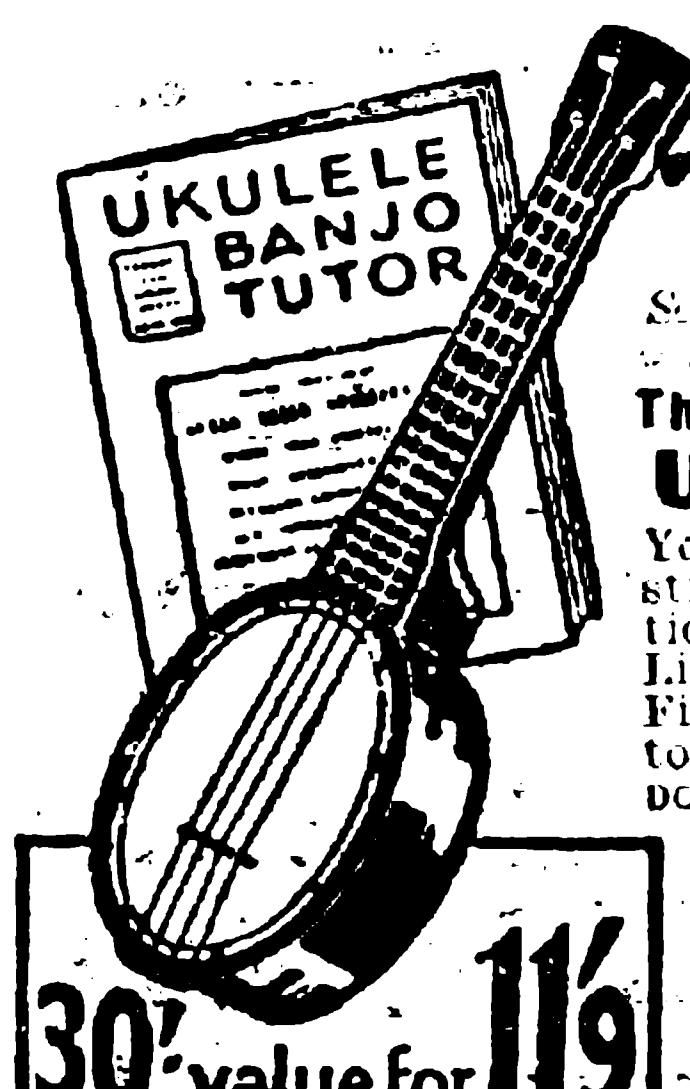
Mis Dorothy Davies, 248, Tufnell Park Road, Highgate, **London, N.19**, wants to hear from girl readers.

W.G. Ball, 244, Windmill Lane, Carlton Road, **Nottingham**, wants correspondents **Australia**.

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